

Within the Limits

Respectability, Class and Gender in Hyderabad

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Thesis Abstract

Drawing on twelve months of fieldwork in suburban Hyderabad, India, this thesis contributes to emerging debates on the Indian new middle classes and postcolonial middle classes more generally. I challenge images of a homogenous middle class enjoying the benefits of liberalization by highlighting the diversity in wealth, lifestyle and access to opportunities within this class sector. Contrary to the pervasive image of a hedonistic and morally corrupt new middle class, I assert the centrality of moral discourses to the construction of middle-class identity in Hyderabad. Middle-class Hyderabadis engage in moral discourses of ‘respectability’ and ‘open-mindedness’ in relation to caste, consumption, education, and women’s public and domestic roles. These discourses of morality are central to the reproduction of class and gender inequality as successfully balancing the demands of respectability and open-mindedness is particularly difficult for those with fewer resources such as the lower middle class and for women who are expected to embody authentic Indianness in their demure comportment, ‘traditional’ attire and commitment to ‘Indian’ family values, but are also liable to being judged ‘backward’ if their clothing and lack of education and paid employment are seen to be in conflict with fashion and open-mindedness. The focus on balance and compromise in middle-class Hyderabadis’ narratives echoes other work on postcolonial middle classes that has emphasised people’s efforts to adhere to local notions of respectable behaviour that are central to national identities while also attempting to align themselves with a ‘modern’ global consumer culture. In contrast to much of this literature, however, I challenge the notion that modernity and tradition, the local and the global are objects of desire in and of themselves and instead argue that they function as important reference points in discourses that legitimate the dominant position of men and those of upper class-caste status.

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Maps

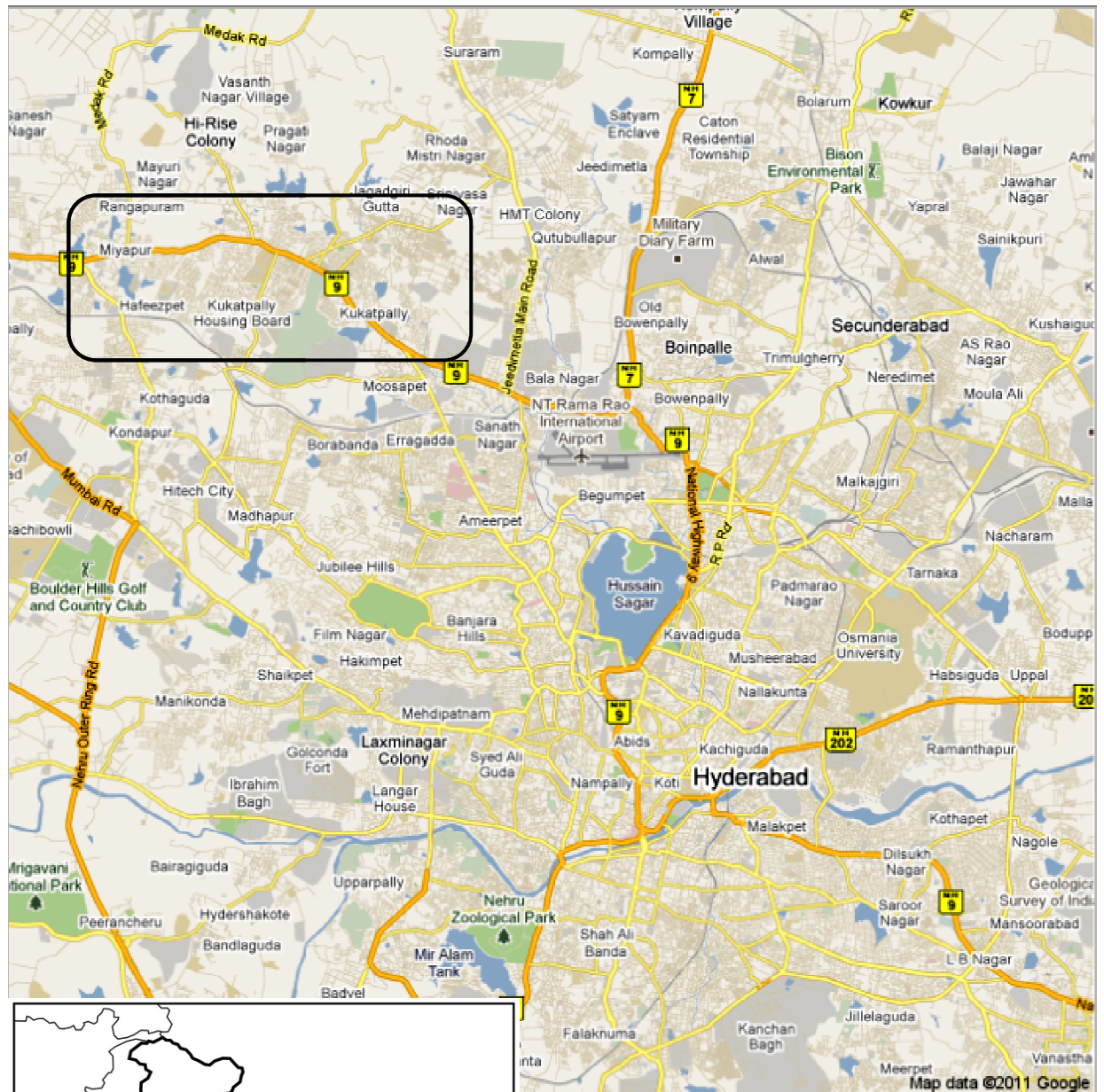


FIGURE 1: Map of Hyderabad showing Miyapur-Kukatpally area



FIGURE 2: Map of India showing Hyderabad and Andhra Pradesh

Introduction

Yashoda was born in 1975 in a small village near the coast of the South Indian state of Andhra Pradesh to a family of land-owning Kshatriyas. She grew up surrounded by an extended network of family spread between two large but simply furnished houses built by her grandfather and his brother. She completed secondary school in the village and then was married at the age of 14 to Seetharam, a cross-cousin ten years her senior. After marriage she attended junior college (A-level equivalent) in a nearby town and then she and Seetharam spent a few years in different parts of the country as Seetharam was transferred between various offices of his employer, an electronics manufacturer. About ten years ago they settled in Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh, with their son and daughter. Seetharam sold the land in Yashoda's ancestral village that had constituted her dowry in order to raise capital for a small manufacturing business which he established with four business partners. Yashoda has spent almost all of her married life as a housewife, but briefly ran her own medical testing business and then a small retail business with a group of female friends. The family lives in a spacious two-bedroom apartment. Although Yashoda's and Seetharam's parents and other relatives often visit from the village, theirs is a nuclear family household. They own a motorbike and a scooter and in 2009 they replaced their small second-hand car with a brand new 8-seater Mahindra Xylo.

Yashoda's daughter, Swetha, turned fifteen in 2010 and was in tenth class at a private English-medium school with extensive sports grounds, a swimming pool and an impressive computer laboratory. Most of Swetha's friends aspire to be doctors or engineers, but she has not yet decided on a career. Swetha's parents will not arrange her marriage until she has completed her undergraduate degree. They hope that Swetha will not, like increasing numbers of young people in the city, find her own partner before then. Swetha hopes to travel abroad one day, perhaps for her university studies.

Many members of Hyderabad's new middle classes have, like Yashoda, experienced significant changes in lifestyle as they have moved from their rural natal homes and established themselves in the city. They are raising children whose lives and aspirations are dramatically different from their own. The rapidity of change is a common topic of conversation in people's homes and workplaces. People express pride in India's burgeoning economy, the improvements in infrastructure and technology that have transformed the country's cities, and the increasingly prominent role that India is playing on the global stage. They are concerned, however, about a relaxing of moral standards, an increasing instability of family, a loss of 'culture and tradition'. As they strive to carve out a better life for themselves and their families, they have to balance notions of the moral virtue of 'Indian culture and traditions' with the sometimes conflicting values and practices associated with 'open-minded' global consumer citizenship.

Middle-class people in Hyderabad do not interpret social change in terms of a straightforward clash between 'modernity' and 'tradition,' the West and India. People strive to adhere to norms of

propriety and to maintain certain customs, which they understand to be part of 'Indian culture'. At the same time they present themselves as progressive, open minded and globally aware. They are not striving to be 'modern'; they assume they live in a modern world. They reject beliefs and practices associated with the past and the rural, but are very cautious about excessive change, particularly change believed to be emulative of the West. People do not want to be perceived as backward or conservative, nor do they want to be seen as overly Westernized. Thus, everyone argues that change must be 'within the limits', although they vary greatly in defining those limits.

The balancing acts that constitute 'limited' change take place in a highly fragmented middle-class landscape. Hyderabad's middle classes are very diverse in terms of wealth, assets, education, consumption habits, family background, and connection to caste, village and other networks. This increasing diversity, along with the rapid social change of which it is part, creates moral ambiguity as people seek to assert the legitimacy of different ideas about appropriate and prestigious behaviour. Individuals and families talk about social change because they are unsure of how best to live in this fragmented social world of ambiguous messages and diverse moral codes. Different people find different ways of balancing established norms of respectability with other sources of status, and the same individual performs this balancing act differently in different contexts. The problematic nature of living with a range of different and often contradictory ideologies remains unresolved and people's lives are characterized by negotiation and compromise.

Contradiction and ambivalence are particularly evident in attitudes toward the elite who are seen by the middle classes as morally inferior due to their less inhibited consumption and sexual behaviour. Emulation of upper-class values and lifestyles can, however, be prestigious as these values and lifestyles have become part of globalized images of happiness, wealth and success. They can also be justified to some extent according to an alternative morality of 'open-mindedness.' Individuals and families may choose to invest in emulation of elite lifestyles of 'fashion' and 'progressive' values or in established norms of respectability depending on their resources and on which routes to status are perceived as most legitimate in their social milieu. Most seek to maximize their resources through a carefully balanced investment in different forms of status. Their success in this endeavour is judged according to the perceived 'fit' between their material, educational and social resources and their claims to 'traditional Indian' respectability or progressive open-mindedness. 'Liberal' ideas and practices can be rejected according to orthodox norms of respectability or accepted on the grounds of progress and rationality. The latter option is, however, only available to those who have the education and material evidence of upper-class status to make their rejection of orthodoxy appear as a legitimate sign of open-mindedness and not merely emulative or deviant.

Negotiations of the limits of respectability and the balancing acts required by this complex system of morality and status form the subject of this thesis. I explore the changing lifestyles of Hyderabad's new middle-classes, the ways in which they make sense of and evaluate these changes and the theoretical frameworks that are best suited to understanding these processes. I am particularly

concerned with how discourses and practices of middle-class morality and limited change are employed in constructing or maintaining hierarchies of class, caste and gender and how the ideologies that structure each of these systems of hierarchy inform and reinforce the others.

According to André Beteille (2003: 79), “The growth and differentiation of the middle class has been one of the most significant developments in Indian society since independence”. This sector of Indian society has, however, only begun to attract substantial public and academic attention since the 1990s when liberalization resulted in growth in both the size and prosperity of the middle class (Fuller & Narasimhan 2006b). Accounts of a greatly expanded Indian middle class who have profited immensely from the new opportunities for education, jobs and consumption are pervasive (Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase 2008). The new middle classes have in many ways become a sign of the promise of a new ‘global’ model of development and thus a vehicle for the hopes of the Indian nation (Fernandes 2000a; Mankekar 1999: 9). They have been presented as the social group which is able to negotiate India’s new relationship with the global economy, both by defining a new cultural standard that rests on practices of commodity consumption and as the recipients of the material benefits of jobs in India’s ‘new economy’ (Fernandes 2000b: 91). At the same time the Indian middle classes have been heavily criticized for their abandonment of socialist political ideals, their indulgence in conspicuous consumption in the face of persistent mass poverty and their corrupt dealings in positions of economic and political power (Varma 1998; Markovits 2003: 50; Kothari 1991; Jagannathan 2011). In this thesis I explore the extent to which these images of the Indian middle classes match the reality of suburban middle-class life in Hyderabad. Through examination of the interconnected changes described by informants in relation to class, caste, education, gender roles, love and marriage, I illustrate the important role of moral discourses in guiding patterns of social change and shaping opportunities for social mobility and equality or, in many cases, the lack thereof.

Setting: Suburban Hyderabad

Hyderabad is the capital city of the south-eastern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. The city was under Muslim rule, first by the Qutb Shahi dynasty, then by the Mughals and then by the Nizams, from its foundation in 1591 until it joined independent India in 1948. In 1798 Hyderabad’s ‘twin’ city, Secunderabad, was established as a British cantonment. When India was partitioned in 1947, the Nizam decided Hyderabad would remain independent rather than join either the Union of India or the Dominion of Pakistan. However, in September 1948 the Indian armed forces launched an attack on Hyderabad and overran the state in only five days, at which point the Nizam agreed to popular rule and was installed as a titular head. Despite this history of Muslim rule, Hindus form a far larger percentage of the population and dominate politically and culturally.

Hyderabad remained a relatively quiet provincial town until the 1990s when it began to attract investment from the Information Technology (IT) industry. As Bangalore, Mumbai and Chennai

began to establish themselves as IT hubs, the government of Andhra Pradesh decided to invest in infrastructure to lure IT companies to the area. In collaboration with private investors, they began the construction of HITEC (Hyderabad Information Technology Engineering Consultancy) City and the first buildings were inaugurated in 1998. The growth of the IT industry in this outer suburb of Hyderabad led to significant and rapid development in areas yet more distant from the city centre. Along with HITEC City itself, these areas have come to be known as Cyberabad.¹

Today Hyderabad has a population of approximately 6.83 million (including recognized ‘metro’ areas immediately outside the official city border), making it the fourth most populous city in India. The centre of the city, known as the Old City, remains predominantly Muslim, but has experienced a decline and is now home mainly to the poor. The elite of the city – politicians, film stars and big businessmen – are concentrated in the suburbs of Banjara Hills, Jubilee Hills, and Film Nagar. The new middle classes, moving to the city in large numbers from rural Andhra Pradesh, have made their homes in the outer suburbs of Cyberabad.

My research is based in and around the suburbs of Miyapur, Kukatpally and KPHB (Kukatpally Housing Board) which are located on the north-western edge of the city, approximately 10 kilometres from HITEC City and 20 kilometres from Charminar at the centre of the Old City (See Figure 1). These areas are located in the Rangareddy District which encompasses Hyderabad’s outer suburbs and nearby rural areas. According to official statistics for 1991, Hindus constitute 85.7 per cent of the district population and Muslims 11.4 per cent. KPHB and Miyapur have grown very rapidly over the past decade and this growth does not appear to be subsiding. The population of the Kukatpally Municipality, of which KPHB is a substantial part, is reported to have grown from 186,963 in 1991 to 292,289 in 2001 (National Informatics Centre District Unit Rangareddy nd).

The residential areas of Kukatpally, KPHB and Miyapur are quite similar. Most middle-class families live in apartment blocks of varying sizes and states of disrepair. There are also gated communities of much taller, more expensive apartment buildings often with sports facilities (including gyms, tennis courts and swimming pools) catering for upper middle-class and elite families. Independent houses are rare, found in older areas of Kukatpally and in a new upmarket development in Miyapur. The Kukatpally/KPHB area is much larger, more developed and less on the edge of the city than Miyapur. While Miyapur peters out into rurality and buffalo graze in vacant lots, Kukatpally/KPHB includes several multi-storey department stores and forms part of a seemingly endless expanse of urban sprawl. Both areas are home to a range of small retail and service businesses, such as banks, tailors, clothing shops, homeware shops, ladies’ ‘fancy’ shops selling bangles and other goods, stationery shops, sweet shops and ‘Kirana’ (general, corner) stores. There are no large air-conditioned malls or upmarket cafés, such as Café Coffee Day or Barrista, in these areas. Upper middle-class families living in Miyapur and Kukatpally/KPHB have to travel into the posh, more central suburbs for such consumer experiences. The poor establish themselves in the

¹ See Xiang (2007: 24-6) for more on the development of the IT industry in Hyderabad.

interstitial spaces of these areas. Migrant construction workers live in blue tarpaulin tents in vacant lots or on construction sites and the better-off live in rows of small, one-room houses that form a *basti* (slum neighbourhood).



FIGURE 3: KPHB Phase III (kspgrp 2010)



FIGURE 4: Shops on the main KPHB/Kukatpally Road (Praveen Y 2011)

Methodology and Ethics

I first visited Hyderabad for three weeks in March/April 2009 armed only with the email address of a local anthropology student at Hyderabad Central University (HCU). I stayed in an international student hostel and with the very generous help of this student, Sucharita, began my search for a field site. Although this project was never conceived of as a school ethnography, I decided to base my

research around two secondary schools. There were a number of reasons for this. Knowing no one in Hyderabad, I needed somewhere to start, a place to go where there would always be someone to talk to, a place that did not require making appointments and reliance on others' hospitality. The schools also gave me access to people of different ages – students, older siblings, teachers, parents, grandparents – which was necessary for getting a sense of inter-generational changes in lifestyle and values. Aside from issues of access, the schools themselves were of interest to me because of the significant resources middle-class Indians devote to education. I did not want to contribute to innovations in pedagogical methods nor was I interested in identifying inequalities in education and proposing suggestions for development. Instead, I hoped that the schools, as institutions of socialization, would provide ideal sites from which to explore the construction and dissemination of middle-class values as teachers and students experienced, explained and evaluated changing styles of life in Hyderabad.

With Sucharita's help, I managed to get a list of schools in the area from Rangareddy District Education Office (DEO) and then spent a day driving around in a hired auto (rickshaw) trying (and mostly failing) to locate schools using the very vague and inaccurate addresses provided by the DEO. It soon became apparent that middle-class children were not to be found in government schools, which, teachers told me, were only attended by those living below the poverty line. Other schools, with their marble floors and air-conditioned classrooms, looked like they catered for the elite. In the end I settled for the first two schools that fit my criteria and were willing, perhaps even eager, to have me. Riversdale appeared to be one step down from the air-conditioned strata, catering to middle and upper-middle class families, and St Catherine's appeared to be one step up from the government schools, catering for predominantly lower middle-class families.

At the end of August 2009 I returned to Hyderabad and conducted fieldwork in Miyapur, KPHB and nearby areas of suburban Hyderabad until October 2010. During my time in Hyderabad I stayed with families of students from the schools – two months each with two families from Riversdale and then the remaining time with a St Catherine's family. I employed two fieldwork methods – participant observation and semi-structured interviews – with a fairly broad range of people in relation to several different topics. In brief, my research consisted of the following:

- Participant observation and teaching in two schools (Riversdale and St Catherine's)
- Interviews with teachers (37 individual interviews at Riversdale; 22 interviews with 30 people at St. Catherine's)
- Interviews with 10th class students
- Parent interviews (18 Riversdale; 20 St. Catherine's)
- Interviews with 'international' school management (8)
- Interviews with junior college, college and university students and young professionals, all sourced through school informants (23 with 33 interviewees)
- Second interviews with parents and teachers focusing on marriage (29)

The following table illustrates how these activities were spread over the months of fieldwork:

Sep-09	Oct-09	Nov-09	Dec-09	Jan-10	Feb-10	Mar-10	Apr-10	May-10	Jun-10	Jul-10	Aug-10	Sep-10	Oct-10
PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION RIVERSDALE													
	PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION ST CATHERINE'S												
			TEACHER INTERVIEWS										
									PARENT INTERVIEWS				
									SCHOOL MANAGEMENT				
											YOUNG PEOPLE INTERVIEWS		
											MARRIAGE INTERVIEWS		

TABLE 1: Fieldwork Methods

(Faded boxes indicate that this activity was engaged in intermittently during this time)

For the first month I went to Riversdale every school day (Monday to Saturday). There I observed classes, taught the occasional English class, talked with students and (most of the time) chatted with teachers in the staff room. Sometimes I acted as a substitute teacher and used this time to gather students' opinions. I encouraged them to discuss aspects of social change in India, organized debates on topics relating to gender, caste, religion and marriage, and got them to draw pictures and write essays. After the first month, I started going to St Catherine's on alternate days, where I taught regular English classes due to a staff shortage. Students and teachers in this school were incredibly busy trying to complete the syllabus as quickly as possible so there would be time for students to learn all the answers by heart (see Chapter 4). This busyness and the rigidity of the syllabus made it impossible for me to devise classroom activities that were relevant to my research. Opportunities for research-related engagement with students and teachers were therefore extremely rare at St Catherine's as they seldom had any free time.

In November 2009 I started conducting semi-structured interviews with Riversdale and St Catherine's teachers on education, their hopes for the future and changing Indian culture. Although many of these topics had come up in more casual conversation in the staff room, particularly at Riversdale, these conversations were often limited by teachers' reluctance to speak too publicly about personal or sensitive matters and their keenness to talk about other topics such as cooking, clothing and their work. I found that people were often more comfortable talking to me alone and were more willing to give me their time and full attention in this more formal setting. I quickly gave up on the idea of audio recording these interviews after many people expressed reluctance. I took notes during the interview, initially on paper and later on my laptop. People seemed comfortable with this arrangement, particularly when they could see and correct what I was typing. By the end of my fieldwork I had conducted individual interviews with 37 staff members at Riversdale, mostly teachers in the senior wing but also with staff members in more managerial roles such as the director, principal and heads of the senior and activities wings. At St Catherine's I conducted some group interviews due to teachers' time constraints and because some teachers were nervous about having to come up with answers alone. By the end of my fieldwork I had conducted 22 interviews with 30 St Catherine's staff members, all teachers except for the principal.

From December 2009 until April 2010, I visited the homes of a few students and teachers and conducted interviews with tenth class students. In June I began a more concerted campaign to interview parents. This involved sending letters home to parents of the new batch of Riversdale tenth class students and telephoning the parents of St Catherine's tenth class students directly. I subsequently interviewed 18 Riversdale parents and 20 St Catherine's parents. These interviews were similar to the teacher interviews, but with slightly less focus on education and more on changing Indian culture and inter-generational relationships. These interviews were conducted in parents' homes and I wrote or typed notes. During this time I also conducted two other sets of interviews. I talked to principals or directors from eight 'international' schools in the city to get a sense of what had created the demand for this type of school and what these kinds of schools are like. I also began interviewing young people who had left school and were in higher education or employment. With these young people I discussed dating, ways of gaining respect from one's peers, and inter-generational differences. From June onwards I only went to the schools when I did not have interviews scheduled.

In August and September of 2010 I was assisted by Alya Hazell who had recently graduated from Oxford with a Human Sciences degree. She continued with the young people interviews and by the end of fieldwork we had conducted 23 interviews with 33 young but out-of-school interviewees. Alya also spent a significant amount of time with 11th class students at Riversdale. While Alya focused on the young people, I began conducting second interviews with teachers and parents who had been particularly helpful in their initial interviews. In these second interviews we talked about love, respect and power sharing in marriage as these had emerged as frequent foci of discussions of social change. Most of these interviews were conducted with individuals (usually women), but in two both husband and wife were present and contributed fairly equally to the discussion. I conducted 29 marriage interviews in total. I audio-recorded and transcribed almost all of these interviews.

My research was mostly conducted in English. Although I tried to learn Telugu before moving to Hyderabad, no classes were available in the UK and *Learn Telugu in 30 Days* proved a rather misleading resource. When I arrived in Hyderabad I managed to acquire a much more accurate Telugu book through a local university professor and devoted significant time and effort to learning the language. However, many of my participants spoke very fluent English and even those who were a little shaky had much better English than my Telugu was ever going to be with only a year to learn. The lack of pressure to use the language on a daily basis meant that by the end of the year I could understand what people were talking about, but frequently could not work out what exactly they were saying. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that many teachers spoke in Hindi, particularly at Riversdale. Language incompetency meant that I was unable to eavesdrop, something I regretted on almost a daily basis. Nevertheless, spending significant periods of time trying to improve my language skills did not make sense when such an abundance of useful information was available in English. I learnt to pay close attention to local particularities in the ways in which English was used and

understood sufficient Telugu to be able to identify instances of direct translation and to question whether any linguistic differences reflected conceptual differences.

I decided fairly early in my fieldwork that I needed a local research assistant to help me eavesdrop in the staffroom and to translate in interviews with parents who did not speak English (many of the Riversdale mothers and almost all St Catherine's parents). Unfortunately, finding someone proved much more difficult than I had anticipated. Throughout my research I was unable to find someone who could assist with staffroom observation and eavesdropping and instead had a series of temporary assistants who helped primarily with scheduling interviews and translating in these interviews. My linguistic limitations and the lack of a permanent research assistant along with the difficulties described above in relation to research at St Catherine's have meant that my understanding of middle and upper middle-class lives is greater than that of the lower middle-class lives of St Catherine's students and their families.

With such reliance on interviews conducted in fairly artificial circumstances, one might wonder whether I have been misled. One might suspect that my ethnography is a superficial account of what people thought I should hear or wanted to hear. The interviews were not conducted in isolation, however. I also spent considerable amounts of time with people outside of interview contexts, observed their actions and interactions, lived with people and casually discussed things said in interviews (without revealing the interviewee) to gauge other people's reactions. It was through participant observation that I learnt what questions to ask, what responses were clichés, and what to ask next to move the interviewees beyond clichés. I interviewed a large number of people so I could look for patterns and inconsistencies. By the end of fieldwork I had developed a clear sense of what certain people would tell me or do in certain contexts and why.

Furthermore, while interviews may have limited value as a source of information on what people actually do, they can tell us a lot about the kinds of narratives that are believed to be socially desirable. According to Säävälä, "new-middle-class people tend to be extremely defensive" (2010: 23) and her middle-class informants in Hyderabad "tended to keep up appearances that, it later transpired, were downright false" (ibid.: 24). She acknowledges, however, that such accounts can be "useful in figuring out what is morally acceptable and how middle-class people would like to present themselves" (ibid.: 25). In this thesis I frequently examine participants' narratives not in terms of their truth value but in terms of the desired presentation of self that they reflect. I treat discourse as a form of performance or practice that informants engage in to achieve particular ends. Examining how middle-class people position themselves in this way is crucial to understanding the systems of public morality they employ in evaluating social change.

Along with my lack of Telugu and my reliance on interviews, my status as a visibly different 'Westerner' may have impeded my ability to gain access to information. Most of my participants had not spoken directly to a non-Indian before and were intrigued by me and my culture. They assumed that I held certain values and engaged in particular practices which they had heard were part of

‘Western’ culture. Occasionally I got the sense that people were hesitant about expressing particular opinions for fear that I would judge them ‘backward’ or, in the case of criticism of Western practices, that I would be offended. I tried to mitigate such instances by keeping my own opinions ambivalent and ambiguous in some contexts and by emphasising the similarities between myself and participants in others. Occasions in which people appeared to be modifying their opinions to please me were rare, however, and were in themselves illuminating about the kinds of opinions people thought they should be embarrassed about or that I might be embarrassed about.

For the most part, being a ‘foreigner’ gave me more access to information than I would have had as a local. People were eager to talk to me because I was different and less reluctant to confide in me because I am unconnected to the world of people whose opinions they care about. Furthermore, as an ‘American’ (the most common local word for Caucasians), I was assumed to have more relaxed moral standards and therefore to be less likely to judge them. Because a lot of what I was researching constituted the ‘common sense’ of middle-class life, my outsider status was necessary to render the taken-for-granted as strange and to get away with asking ‘stupid’ questions. In addition, people’s curiosity about my ‘culture’ often led to some of the most interesting discussions. As I wanted participants to be honest with me, I felt it was only fair that I answer all their questions about ‘Western’ and my own courtship practices and family life as accurately as possible. In exploring the differences between ‘Indian culture’ and ‘Western culture’ with participants, I was able to get a particularly clear idea of their perceptions of the moral boundaries of Indian middle-class life.

Finally, it is necessary to reflect on the boundaries and representativeness of the field site and the participant group. In many ways this research is rather unwieldy with a wide range of areas of investigation and great diversity in the age, living conditions and other demographic characteristics of participants. There were many opportunities for consolidation during fieldwork. The difficulties of conducting research at St Catherine’s led me to consider focusing exclusively on the middle and upper middle-class families who sent their children to Riversdale. However, the relational nature of middle-class identities made it impossible to understand the lives of one sector without reference to the lives of the others. I considered eliminating certain areas of research, age groups, non-Telugus and non-Hindus from my research. But gender roles, so central to middle-class notions of respectability, could not be understood without reference to changing courtship and marriages practices, while education’s fundamental role in reproducing class could not be ignored. Changes could not be understood without talking to people of all ages, and sidelining the voices of non-Telugus and non-Hindus would have created an artificially homogeneous picture of Hyderabad’s middle classes.

The research process drew me constantly outwards, exploring new topics with new people. I found, as Matai Candea (2007: 173-4) did during his fieldwork in Corsica, that “Fieldwork involved constant choices, and there was often no good reason to prioritize one over the other.” Like Candea, my months of fieldwork passed “with a constant sense of incompleteness and arbitrariness, the

obsessive feeling of missing out, of vagueness and unjustifiable indeterminacy, of never being in the right place at the right time” (ibid.: 174). As Candea asserts, such experiences and feelings are symptomatic of all fieldwork. As ethnographers our task is not to convince ourselves and our readers of the holistic unity of the object of study, but rather to acknowledge its arbitrariness, our gaps in knowledge, the lack of coherence. While this ‘chaos’ is rendered pragmatically coherent and accessible to a significant degree by the abstraction and distance of constructing ethnography as text, I shall endeavour in this thesis to highlight inconsistencies and gaps in knowledge.

Thus, in my fieldwork I have drawn a somewhat arbitrary boundary around a group of middle-class people I met through two schools and a set of interrelated topics that I perceived to be central to their understandings of a changing India. While the schools were chosen rather unsystematically and were atypical in some regards, they were not particularly unusual. While participants were not randomly selected for the representativeness of Hyderabad’s new middle-classes, I have no reason to believe that their lives and viewpoints were significantly different from other middle-class families in the city. The research is also heavily weighted toward the experiences and viewpoints of women as male informants were more difficult to source. This gender-bias is reflected in the areas of investigation which are largely focused on domestic and family matters and exclude more masculine domains of politics, work (with the exception of the highly feminized workplace of the schools), and all-male leisure pursuits. I endeavour to make these gaps, biases and limits to knowledge and understanding clear throughout this thesis.

In this thesis I have sought to maintain the anonymity of participants by changing the names of the schools and giving only vague details of their locations. I have also used pseudonyms for all participants and have avoided disclosing information that might make a person identifiable. This has necessitated the use of composites for some case studies (Chapter 1) and changing details in others. I have deliberately avoided providing a detailed table of participant demographics or *dramatis personae*. While this makes it difficult for the reader to get a coherent sense of a ‘whole’ person and obscures relationships between informants, it ensures that informants cannot be identified even by those who know them well.

Interviews were recorded in different ways and I have used different symbols to indicate the accuracy of ‘quotes’ and whether translation was involved:

1. If no symbol appears after the quote this indicates that the interview was conducted in English, audio-recorded and later transcribed. Quotes from these interviews are verbatim.
2. If an asterisk (*) appears after the ‘quote’ this indicates that the interview was conducted in English, but no audio-recorder was used, notes were written or typed. I have not ‘quoted’ from interviews where I took written notes as I was only able to record an approximation of what people had said. In interviews where I typed notes, however, I was able to record almost exactly what was said, leaving out only repetition and interjections. These ‘quotes’, then, are very close approximations of what was actually said.

3. If a 'T' appears after the 'quote' this indicates that the interview was conducted in Telugu with an amateur translator. The interview was either audio-recorded and later transcribed by the translator, or I took notes during the interview. Whether transcribing or translating in the interview for my note-taking, the translator tended to summarize what was said so these 'quotes' are not word-for-word.

The nebulous boundaries of my field site and the diversity of interactions with different participants make it difficult to provide a comprehensive list of the middle-class Hyderabadis I spoke to and their demographics. Some indication of the nature of the participant group can, however, be gained through a broad overview of the student/parent demographics at Riversdale and St Catherine's. Because I chose to focus on tenth class students and their parents, the ages of parents interviewed is fairly consistent – early forties for fathers and late thirties for mothers. Almost all students at Riversdale are Hindu, but at St Catherine's there is a large Muslim population – 33 per cent in the classes for which I have data – which reflects the fact that the school is part of a chain run by a Muslim family. Muslim parents did not, however, respond to requests for interviews. Although I spoke to a few Christian teachers and parents, the material that follows overwhelmingly reflects opinions held by Hindus.

The different caste composition of the student population at Riversdale and St Catherine's is illustrated below. Note that at Riversdale, non-Hindus (a very small number of students) have been included in the 'other' category along with Hindu 'Forward Castes'.²

CASTE/RELIGION	N	%
HINDU SC/ST	5	3.5
HINDU OBC	39	27.7
HINDU FC	46	32.6
MUSLIM	46	32.6
CHRISTIAN	5	3.5
TOTAL	141	99.9

TABLE 2: Caste and Religion of St Catherine's 8th to 10th Class Students (data gathered directly from students)

CASTE	N	%
SC	14	1
ST	5	0.3
OBC	147	11
OTHER/FC	1129	87
TOTAL	1295	99.3

TABLE 3: Caste Composition of Riversdale Students (data taken from official school records)

² Participants used the following caste categories:

- SC/ST – Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe;
- BC – locally defined as 'Backward Caste', but the official category is Other Backward Classes (OBC);
- OC – Other Caste, meaning not BC/SC/ST, i.e., castes for which there are no reservations. I have used Forward Caste (FC) rather than OC to avoid confusion with OBC.

These tables indicate that while Riversdale is overwhelmingly upper-caste Hindu, St Catherine's has a significant lower-caste as well as Muslim population.

St Catherine's parents almost all had two or three children, except for Muslim parents who had often had four to six children (something Hindu families were very critical of). Almost all Riversdale parents had one or, most commonly, two children. I estimate that 60 to 70 per cent of St Catherine's and Riversdale families live in nuclear households with most of the grandparent generation living in their natal villages. Most St Catherine's families had moved to Hyderabad in the last 10 to 20 years, whereas a number of Riversdale families were more recent migrants, many arriving in the last five years and most having lived in Hyderabad for less than ten years.

The vast majority of mothers at both Riversdale and St Catherine's are housewives. Riversdale fathers work as engineers (many are software engineers), managers, successful businessmen, defence officers and in other similarly paid occupations. The stated incomes of those parents I interviewed or who responded to a questionnaire ranged considerably from as little as Rs 30,000 (£370) per month (I am not sure how such parents afforded Riversdale school fees) to as much as Rs 200,000 (£2,460) per month. Most parents had a combined income of Rs 50,000 (£620) to Rs 150,000 (£1,850) per month. Examples of St Catherine's fathers' occupations include auto-rickshaw and bus driver, shopkeeper, plumber and electrician. Some St Catherine's parents claimed to earn as little as Rs 5,000 (£62) per month (again, I do not know how such parents afforded school fees) and there are one or two families earning over Rs 100,000 (£1,230) per month, but most have a combined income of Rs 10,000 (£120) to Rs 20,000 (£240) per month.³

The table below shows the level of education of Riversdale and St Catherine's parents who were interviewed or responded to a questionnaire. Unfortunately, St Catherine's parents were far less responsive to the questionnaire than Riversdale parents resulting in a very small sample size.

	HUSBAND'S HIGHEST QUAL.				WIFE'S HIGHEST QUAL.			
	ST CATHERINE'S		RIVERSDALE		ST CATHERINE'S		RIVERSDALE	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
NONE	4	19	0	0	4	20	0	0
LESS THAN 10th	5	23.8	0	0	5	25	1	2
10th CLASS	4	19	1	1.9	3	15	5	9.8
JUNIOR COLLEGE	1	4.8	2	3.8	4	20	2	3.9
PRE-DEGREE QUAL.	4	19	3	5.7	0	0	3	5.9
DEGREE	3	14.3	29	54.7	3	15	28	54.9
POST-GRAD DIPLOMA	0	0	1	1.9	0	0	1	2
POSTGRAD DEGREE	0	0	17	32	1	5	11	21.6
TOTAL	21	99.9	53	100	20	100	51	100.1

TABLE 4: Education of Riversdale and St Catherine's Parents

³ All currency conversion is based on the xe.com exchange rate on 01 December 2011.

St Catherine's thus caters for significantly poorer and less educated families than does Riversdale.

Making Class and Gender

In suburban middle-class Hyderabad both (caste-inflected) class and gender are produced through discourses and practices of middle-class 'respectability' and cosmopolitan 'open-mindedness'. These discourses and practices serve to mask, naturalize and thereby legitimize relations of power and subordination. Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capitals, fields and symbolic violence provide a systematic framework for understanding how class and gender are socially and culturally produced and reproduced, and how privilege in one system of hierarchy can confer advantage in others. Much of the literature on India's new middle classes has stressed, as I do in this thesis, the importance of investment in education, 'cultured' behaviour, conspicuous consumption and social contacts in people's attempts to maintain or improve their class status (e.g., Jeffrey 2010: 172). It is useful, then, to conceive of class not simply in Marxist terms of positions created by the mode of production of capitalism, but, as Bourdieu does, in terms of a "set of actually usable resources and powers" (1984: 114) that includes social capital (connections to high-capital individuals and groups) and cultural capital (education and other forms of knowledge) as well as economic capital. For Bourdieu, a person's class position is a product of their total *volume* of capital, especially economic and cultural (1984: 128-9), the *composition* of their capital, i.e., the relative volume of each form of capital, and *trajectory*, the change or stability a person has experienced over time in the volume and composition of their capital.

The multidimensionality of Bourdieu's system of stratification allows for examination not only of vertical movement in class location (volume of capital) but also of horizontal movement as the composition of a person's capital changes through a 'conversion' of capitals. This is particularly useful in understanding the class dynamics of suburban Hyderabad where the middle classes are divided by trajectory – old middle class versus new middle class – and by the composition of capital – the old middle classes tend to have more cultural than economic capital whereas the opposite is true of the new middle classes. The new middle classes convert their economic capital into cultural capital by sending their children to expensive private schools in an effort to secure the legitimacy of their class position and in the hope that this cultural capital will in turn result in economic capital through high-paying jobs for their children (see Chapters 1 and 4).

Bourdieu's theory of practice explores class not as a pre-formed self-subsistent entity, but as something people construct through practice. According to Bourdieu, through socialization in a particular class position, external structures, particularly social power relations, are inscribed on the body in the form of the habitus, "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (1990b: 53). The habitus predisposes a person to

looking at and evaluating the world, to feeling, thinking, judging and acting in ways consistent with the limits of the structure, i.e. in ways that reproduce their class position (Ortner 2006: 109). The habitus manifests itself in the bodily hexis – for example, a habitus of ‘ease or cultivated naturalness’ that enables the elite “to disguise what they have *learned* as what they are *born* with” (Jenkins 2002: 139). Thus in Hyderabad, the enduring habitus of those of low caste-class status is evident in a hexis of subordination and fear that is deemed unsuitable for jobs in the new economy where ‘communication skills’ and ‘exposure’, indicated in part by confidence, are valued (Chapters 2 and 4). The habitus also manifests in ‘taste’ – a bourgeois ‘sense of distinction’ defined by its overriding aesthetic sensibility versus a working-class ‘taste for necessity’ that prioritizes function over form (Bourdieu 1984: 175-6).

The privilege of the elite is, for Bourdieu, defined in large part by their ability to define what constitutes legitimate cultural capital, that is, ‘good’ taste and manners and legitimate knowledge. Class inequality is reproduced without direct, coercive social control because “power relations are perceived not for what they objectively are but in a form that renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder” (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990: xiii). Thus in Hyderabad new economy employers, particularly software companies, pride themselves in appointing staff on the basis of merit (rather than on the basis of bribes and connections). Although ‘merit’ appears to be a legitimate criterion to all class sectors, it is defined in terms of qualifications and forms of cultural capital to which the upper middle class and elite have privileged access. Privilege is ignored and thus becomes translated into merit (Jenkins 2002: 111). As Bourdieu argues, “The very lifestyle of the holders of power contributes to the power that makes it possible, because its true conditions of possibility remain unrecognized” (1990b: 139). Bourdieu describes the process whereby upper-class taste, manners and education are perceived as indicative of ‘natural’ aptitude, achievement and refinement, as ‘misrecognition’, which is itself a form of ‘symbolic violence’.

In this thesis I am primarily concerned with moral discourses and their associated ‘tastes’ and practices as forms of misrecognition or symbolic violence. Hyderabad’s middle classes distinguish themselves from the supposedly cultureless and ‘backward’ lower classes through discourses and practices of respectability or decency, and of ‘exposure’ or ‘open-mindedness’. Power relations are legitimized through the misrecognition of differences in economic, social and cultural capital as differences in morality and mentality. In asserting the legitimacy of their own cultural capital vis-à-vis that of the elite, Hyderabad’s middle classes turn again to discourses and practices of respectability or propriety. A concept of the inherent decency of reserve and restraint enables the middle class to justify and valorise the fact that they have less capital than the elite. In many ways, however, this is a ‘taste of necessity’, a “dominated ‘aesthetic’ which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics” with which the middle classes have a “twofold and contradictory” relationship of emulation and rejection (Bourdieu 1984: 41).

Of course, different forms of capital, different types of cultural capital and different habitus are valued differently or have different legitimacy in different spheres of social life. Bourdieu suggests we think of each such context as a 'field' in which individuals from more or less advantageous positions are caught up in competition and struggle with one another to maintain or increase their resources (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 16-18). Different class 'games' are played out in each of these fields, each with its own set of unspoken rules as well as its own rewards or 'stakes'. Among Hyderabad's middle classes different forms of morality have different value depending on the field and are valued differently by different class sectors which struggle to assert the superior legitimacy of one or the other, to "define the legitimate principle of domination" (Bourdieu 1984: 254). Success in middle-class status games involves developing a 'feel for the game' that involves recognizing which 'mode' of moralized cultural capital – respectability, open-mindedness or, most commonly, a specific combination of the two – is required for each field and the ease and confidence to perform each mode convincingly as required.

For Bourdieu (2001), gender, like class, is embodied in the habitus as masculine and feminine ways of walking, moving and looking at the world, masculine and feminine gestures, facial expressions and manners. Because gender is embodied in the habitus (McNay 1999) and because the opposition between male and female is inserted into a system of homologous oppositions (Bourdieu 2001: 7), differences between men and women appear 'natural' and the social relation of domination which underlies them is obscured. He argues:

The social order functions as an immense symbolic machine tending to ratify the masculine domination on which it is founded: it is the sexual division of labour, the very strict distribution of activities assigned to each sex, of their place, time and instruments; it is the structure of space, with the opposition between the place of assembly or the market, reserved for men, and the house, reserved for women ... (2001: 10-11).

Bourdieu suggests that the body is socially constructed in the sense that rather than the biology of reproduction determining gender, our perception of bodies as biologically different is a product of the arbitrary social construction of gender divisions (2001: 12-14). Male domination, then, is a form of symbolic violence – the invocation of biology masks socially produced power relations to the extent that they appear legitimate even to women (Moi 1991: 1030). Gender appears self-evident as processes of legitimating have veiled the social processes and structures through which gender is produced. Thus, "femininity is misrecognised as a natural, essentialised personality disposition" (Skeggs 2005: 23).

According to Bourdieu, "sexual properties are as inseparable from class properties as the yellowness of a lemon is from its acidity" (1984: 107). Unfortunately, Bourdieu does not elaborate on the relationship between class and gender himself (McCall 1992: 851-2). A number of feminist scholars have suggested that it is useful to think of femininity and masculinity as forms of cultural capital or symbolic capital (Moi 1991; McCall 1992). Appropriate performances of gender are often

necessary in pursuing class interests and certain forms of cultural capital are undoubtedly gendered. It is, nevertheless, misleading to subsume gender within class games. Rather, gender, like class, is a foundational form of status. For Bourdieu (2001: 30-1), “male domination constitutes the paradigm (and often the model and stake) of all domination” (see also Bourdieu 1979). Gender, like class, structures fields, facilitates access to resources and shapes capital conversion projects. Accordingly, the focus in this thesis is on the ways which class and gender distinctions are mutually reinforcing and involve similar processes of misrecognition.

Gender is the ground upon which many of middle-class Hyderabad’s class games are played. As Ortner (2006: 26) has observed of the United States, “class discourse is submerged within, and spoken through sexual discourse.” It is not simply that class is ‘hiding’ within these other discourses which need to be stripped away through a process of ‘intellectual archaeology’ to reveal ‘class itself’ (Ortner 2006: 72-3, 78); rather class and gender appear inextricably intertwined. In Hyderabad, notions of middle-class respectability are inseparable from issues of female sexuality. According to Beverly Skeggs (1997: 3), “Respectability has always been a marker and a burden of class, a standard to which to aspire”. This form of public morality places women at the centre as middle-class women are constructed as more respectable than their working- or lower-class peers on the basis of their responsibility, the control of their sexuality, their care, protection and education of children in their roles as wives and mothers (ibid.: 5). Because the feminine and the sexual are seen as sharply divided, respectable female conduct is decidedly asexual. Accordingly, failure to adhere to norms of ‘respectable’ appearance is seen as a sign of deviant, lower-class, unfeminine sexuality and women are socialized to invest in their bodies as a form of cultural capital in order to communicate to others who they are (ibid.: 83, 99-100; see also Ortner 2006: 33-4). Legitimate femininity and middle-class respectability are thus so closely intertwined that for a woman to be deemed legitimately middle-class she has to be ‘respectable’, and for a woman to be deemed respectable she has to be middle-class. Class informs whether and how respectability, particularly feminine respectability, as a subject position can be taken up (Skeggs 1997: 94). Following Skeggs, I argue that in middle-class Hyderabad it is through homologies between the oppositions employed in class and gender distinctions – respectably middle-class and respectable femininity, for example – that people seek to assert their ideas about “what it is right to be” (Bourdieu 1984: 228) and thus misrecognize class and gender power relations as legitimate on the grounds of morality.

In middle-class Hyderabad different forms of femininity compete for legitimacy – a respectable femininity of modesty and domesticity, an open-minded femininity of higher education, paid employment and equitable marital relations and a fashionable femininity of ‘modern’ dress, leisure consumption and romance. Upper middle-class women in Hyderabad are less likely to be impeded by gender in gaining institutionalized power, particularly in terms of education and employment, and are also able partially to disregard the rules of respectable femininity due to the legitimacy provided by their economic and social capital along with other forms of cultural capital

(see Moi 1991: 1038). They seek to assert the superiority of an open-minded femininity. As lower middle-class women do not have sufficient capital to gain access to the prestigious education and employment that constitute open-minded femininity or completely to buy in to fashionable femininity, they are torn between emulating their class superiors and rejecting the legitimacy of their 'open-minded' and 'fashionable' cultural capital in favour of demure respectability (Chapters 5-7).

It is necessary to depart from Bourdieu in order to understand the response of the dominated to their subordination. For Bourdieu, misrecognition and the inaccessibility of the habitus to consciousness ensure the dominated have little understanding or agency; they are convinced of the legitimacy of their subordination and thus cannot find ways to evade or resist. They subconsciously adjust their expectations to match the probability of their realization. It is difficult to account for the reflexivity with which people in Hyderabad spoke about their class and gender positions, the lofty aspirations of the lower-middle class and women's critique of masculine domination within this framework. Hegemony is clearly not total or absolute and social reproduction is never perfect.

In this thesis I temper Bourdieu's emphasis on the generative (but not determining (McNay 1999; Bourdieu 1984: 111; 1990a: 116)) effects of the habitus by acknowledging the role played by people with aspirations, desires, fears and the capacity for reflexivity in living within and/or against the major structural constraints of class and gender, and thus in both reproducing and/or transforming them (Ortner 2003: 205). First, following Ortner (2003: 215), I attend to the role of the imagination and acknowledge that the aspirations of middle-class Hyderabadis are not entirely a product of their class positions, but are also shaped by media imaginings of the attainability of middle-class affluence (Appadurai 1996), people's own propensity to dream of a better future for themselves and their children, and their resistance to the lack of legitimacy they experience in daily life (Skeggs 1997: 82).

Second, I incorporate Paul Willis' (1977) notion of 'cultural production' in order to present middle-class Hyderabadis as creatively constructing performances of respectability, open-mindedness, fashion and femininity that are informed by a partial consciousness of the ways in which they are shaped by their circumstances. Willis' ethnographic account of 'working class lads' in a Midlands school outlines the ways in which these young men subverted the dominant culture by devaluing school life and resisting its attempts to make them work. The lads are portrayed as active producers of this counter-school culture rather than as passive victims of social reproduction. They see through school discourses of individualism and meritocracy and assert that working-class achievement in school would only serve to inflate the currency of qualifications and legitimize middle-class privilege, rather than lifting the working class out of subordination. Their resistance to conformity – 'having a laff' and 'wagging off' – eventually condemns the lads to a shop-floor existence and ensures the reproduction of the very system that they have rejected.

While Bourdieu's working class reproduce their class position through processes of misrecognition, Willis' do so in a more contradictory fashion that involves moments of 'partial

penetration' in which people 'see into' the conditions of their existence. Concepts of cultural production and partial penetration are particularly useful in understanding women's response to their subordination. While gender can to some extent be understood as misrecognition, women are able to partially penetrate the legitimacy of their subordination as they critique masculine traits and dispositions (Chapter 6; see also Skeggs 2005: 25-6). A theoretical framework that incorporates the role of imagination and the potential for cultural production into Bourdieu's model of social reproduction allows us to see how individual agency "is locked in a dialectic with capital, enabled or constrained by it, on the one hand, and reproducing or transforming it on the other" (Ortner 2003: 205) and thus how social change can and does happen as one generation succeeds the next.

Chapter Outline

This thesis is about class, gender and frameworks for understanding social change among the Indian middle classes. I argue that in Hyderabad the middle class has become highly fragmented and that these fragments remain remarkably isolated from each other. The effect of this fragmentation is a complex moral universe. As people try to locate themselves within the middle classes by virtue of their morality and respectability, they draw on a range of often contradictory discourses about what it means to be Indian, decent, progressive, open-minded and a 'global citizen'. The ability to navigate this moral universe through appropriate contextual discourses and practices is a form of cultural capital and thus a mechanism through which social inequalities are reproduced. I argue that it is particularly difficult for women to navigate this moral universe due to their association with authentic Indianness and the centrality of their sexuality to notions of middle-class respectability. Alongside this discussion of the experience of social change in middle-class Hyderabad, I interrogate the orientation of this change, asking whether the primary reference points in middle-class aspirations are 'the West', 'the modern' and/or a local upper middle-class or elite.

In the following chapter I provide some historical context for this discussion of Indian middle classes. I describe the emergence of an educated, professional middle class during the colonial period, their consolidation during the nationalist movement and the emergence post-liberalization of both newly middle-class people and new ways of being middle-class based primarily on consumption. Throughout this history I discuss different ways in which scholars have sought to understand social change among the Indian middle classes – in terms of a public-modern-Western/private-traditional-Indian divide, in terms of compartmentalization, modernization, Westernization and traditionalism. I then discuss a number of definitions of the Indian middle classes and use case studies from my own research to illustrate the complex range of factors involved in determining middle-class status and the futility of attempts to apply rigid economically derived typologies.

Chapter Two, the first ethnographic chapter, is concerned with the relationship between class and caste. I discuss participants' assertion that caste has little relevance in contemporary urban life

and their explanations of the situations in which it does play a role. I then explore the interconnectedness of class and caste, which ensures that class mobility is particularly difficult for lower-caste individuals and families. I argue that the denial of caste prejudice is both a way of presenting oneself as open-minded and middle-class, and a means for maintaining upper-caste privilege.

In Chapter Three, I discuss local understandings of what it means to be middle-class, which emerged particularly clearly in informants' talk about the elite and the poor. Informants asserted the superior decency or respectability of the middle classes in terms of their reserve, restraint and concern for 'Indian culture' in areas such as consumption, dress, leisure and gender roles. This image of middle-class morality was contrasted with a picture of the cultureless and impulsive poor and the hedonistic Westernized elite. I explore the ways in which middle-class Hyderabadis utilise discourses of respectability in negotiating an 'appropriate' engagement in status-seeking consumption, and demonstrate how the centrality of boundary-maintenance to respectability is reflected in the growth of more privatized exclusive public spaces for the elite.

Education, particularly school education, is explored in Chapter Four. I describe the rise of a new breed of 'international' schools in Hyderabad that aim to provide students with understanding and 'exposure'. These schools contrast with less expensive private schools, which are solely focused on high exam marks achieved through rote learning. These different types of schools contribute to the reproduction of class inequality in the city as high paying employers look for the 'cultural capital' provided by 'exposure' schools. I end this chapter by considering the ways in which 'exposure' schools orient themselves toward India, the West, 'tradition' and 'modernity'.

Chapters Five to Seven are concerned with the changing roles of women. In Chapter Five I discuss the post-liberalization emergence of an image of an emancipated 'new Indian woman' who successfully straddles the 'home' and the 'world'. Following examination of changing attitudes toward women in paid employment and education, I argue that, although the lives of women in terms of their education levels and their opportunities for employment have changed radically, this has not led to significant changes in ideas about women's roles; their primary responsibilities remain domestic.

In Chapter Six I explore the rise of companionate marriage ideals, expressed by informants through an emphasis on friendship and equality in marriage. These new ideals are reflected in changing practices of courtship, which include the increased involvement of young people in the process of parentally-initiated spouse selection, as well as parents' growing willingness to arrange marriages when children choose their own spouse. Despite the importance of discourses of companionate marriage to the construction of a progressive middle-class identity, genuine equality in marriage does not appear to have emerged. Culturally legitimate power continues to reside with men such that husbands determine the style of marriage to which their wives must adhere.

The intersection of class and gender in women's use of public space and their involvement in pre-marital relationships are discussed in Chapter Seven. Women are expected to only enter public space with a specific purpose, to avoid male spaces of public leisure, to adopt demure forms of bodily

comportment, and to dress modestly. For upper middle-class and elite women, however, more options for 'suitable' femininity are available as they can access exclusive elite spaces of leisure consumption considered appropriate for women, and can negotiate the boundaries of modesty if their clothing is sufficiently fashionable and expensive. A similar tension between fashion and respectability can be observed in relation to relationships between young men and women. Although most middle-class people, particularly those in the parental generation, remain very uncomfortable with the notion of pre-marital relationships of any kind, young people appear to be increasingly attracted to a form of 'timepass' dating as its immersion in a world of high-status leisure consumption earns respect from their peers. This form of relationship tends to only result in status for men, however, as young women who engage in temporary relationships with men are seen as sexually deviant and unsuitable brides. Young women are caught between the need to protect their respectability through the maintenance of an image of sexual purity and the potential to accrue a kind of interpersonal power through fashion, desirability and being sexually available.

I conclude by considering the implications of this research for arguments about the gendered nature of social mobility and by exploring the orientation of change, and reference points for aspiration, in the narratives of middle-class Hyderabadis. In relation to the former, I argue that the movement from lower to upper middle-class status does appear to result in a better position for women, both within their families and in wider society, but equality remains limited by notions of Indian culture and feminine respectability at all levels. In relation to the latter, I challenge the notion that modernity and tradition, the local and the global are objects of desire in and of themselves. Instead I argue that they function as important reference points in discourses that legitimate the dominant position of men and those of upper class-caste status.

1

The Indian Middle Classes and Social Change

Ravi is a slightly built, friendly and mischievous 25-year-old St Catherine's teacher dressed always in the cheap trousers and shirts associated with villagers and urban lower-middle classes. He grew up in a village in Guntur District and is from a poor family. His caste falls under the official category of Other Backward Classes (locally referred to as BC) which entitles him to reserved seats in educational institutions. This has facilitated his study through to Master's level in science. However, he lacks the social and cultural capital – English language skills, dress, bodily comportment and contacts in IT – to truly take advantage of the liberalizing economy. Although his salary, Rs 16,000 (£200) a month, is high for a teacher, this is sufficient for only a very modest style of life. He lives in a small one-bedroom apartment with his wife and baby daughter, owns a motorbike and is saving up to buy a computer. Ravi has a good English vocabulary but is nervous when speaking the language and often does so with an exaggerated poshness that simultaneously highlights and mocks the fact that English is something of a performance for him.

How does one locate someone like Ravi in a class structure? Like so many young people in India (Nisbett 2007; Jeffrey et al. 2008; Jeffrey 2010), he has high institutionalized cultural capital (formal education), but without embodied (*habitus*) and objectified (dress) cultural capital and without social capital, he is limited in his ability to turn this into comparable levels of economic capital. In order to understand the complex ways in which different knowledge, behaviour and material goods have come to be positively valued as cultural capital and how this capital has come to be distributed across classes it is necessary to examine the historical emergence and development of the Indian middle classes. Such a history demonstrates not only the changing significance of different forms of capital over time, but also the different trajectories by which people have achieved middle-class status. As Fernandes (2006: 3) argues, these historical processes “have played a central role in structuring the distribution of social, cultural, and economic capital such as language (and the politics of English), education, employment, social status, and access to state power, all of which have shaped the new middle class in enduring ways”. Throughout this history I explore the Indian middle classes' changing attitudes toward the modern and the West and the degree to which they can be said to be ‘modernizing’ or ‘Westernizing’. I then consider a number of ways of defining the Indian middle classes.

The Colonial Middle Classes

Contrasts are often drawn between the old colonial and postcolonial middle classes and the new post-liberalization middle class. The new middle class do not, however, represent a radical break with the old middle classes, and it is therefore necessary to consider the processes by which the latter group formed in order to understand contemporary processes of class making in India. The 'old' Indian middle class emerged in the liminal space between the colonial state and traditional elites (Fernandes 2006: 1). Misra divides this middle class into four categories – commercial, industrial, landed, and educated professional, but these categories were far from discrete – families that achieved middle-class status through their commercial activity took advantage of English education and invested in land (Misra 1978: 343; see also Reifeld 2003), and the landed upper and middle class were driven increasingly to English education as a route to social mobility by the division and declining prosperity of their property (Misra 1978: 276). In addition, some categories were barely in existence – the industrial middle class remained negligible until after Independence as middle-class positions of industrial superintendence and direction were filled by non-Indian British East India Company employees.

Thus, despite some diversity in the middle classes, “the overall pattern of development pushed the emerging middle classes increasingly to rely on education as a means of achieving access to employment and economic power” (Fernandes 2006: 4). It is because of this reliance on education that the colonial middle class is widely regarded to be a product of colonial education policy, by which the British sought to create, as Macaulay stipulated in his famous ‘Minute on Indian Education’ (1835), “a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect”.

After 1870 English education began to spread among ordinarily well-to-do and lower middle-class families and “the bulk of the middle classes came to consist of the intelligentsia – public servants, other salaried employees, and members of the learned professions” (Misra 1978: 344). The legal profession was the most important during this time and it was not until the 1920s that it began to be superseded by science and technology, trade and industry (*ibid.*: 307). The educated professional middle class included those in government service, qualified professionals such as doctors, engineers and lawyers, teachers in big urban schools and higher education, journalists, white-collar workers in the private sector, legislators and university students (Varma 1998). This educated middle class was drawn primarily from the high castes, particularly Brahmins who had a pre-colonial history of education.

By the end of the nineteenth century a new urbanized elite was consolidating as a result of the growing institutionalization of English education. Their education and language distinguished them from traditional elites as well the vernacular lower middle class (Markovits 2003) and they increasingly drew on these distinctions in staking their public claims to leadership. Their practices of distinction

and projects of class-making involved the invocation of new forms of respectability, moral regeneration, and social reform (Chatterjee 1993; Joshi 2001) based on the educational training and occupational hierarchies of middle-class professional employment and assertions of moral superiority connected to the cultural dimensions of modernization (Fernandes 2006: 11).

During the colonial period attitudes toward the West, the modern and social change in India were shaped by ideas of ‘civilization’. Foreign rule was deemed necessary because Indians needed to become enlightened (Chatterjee 1997: 19) or ‘civilized’ through the creation of an Indian modernity in imitation of the West. The colonial middle classes absorbed this rhetoric to some extent. MN Srinivas (1992 [1966]) suggests that the new colonial elite in India admired and envied the political and economic power of the British as well as their knowledge, ideas and technology. In response to this they sought to reform Indian society through education, the abolition of ‘social evils’ and the adoption of more European forms of family life such as nuclear households and companionate marriage in the hope that India would eventually compete with Western countries on equal terms. Middle-classness came to be understood in terms of a particular orientation to modernity:

It meant being open-minded and egalitarian; following the rule of law and not being swayed by private motive or particularistic agenda; being fiscally prudent and living within one’s means; and embracing science and rationality in the public sphere. It demanded setting aside the primordial loyalties of caste and kinship and opening oneself to new affinities and associations based on merit and to identities forged in the workplace (Baviskar & Ray 2011: 5-6).

At the same time, Western scholarly work on Indian literature and history had given members of this new Indian elite a sense of pride in the rich and ancient culture of their country. This ambivalence toward the West is embodied in the reform efforts of Ram Mohan Roy whose study of Christianity and exploration of the limits of Unitarian universalism led him to promote a universal, rational religion based on the Vedas and Upanishads through the Brahmo Samaj (van der Veer 2001).

Scholars working within the framework of Subaltern Studies have interpreted this ambivalent attitude toward the West in terms of an attempt to create a distinctively Indian modernity. They argue that the nationalist drive to create a ‘modern’ India did not involve an attempt to slavishly imitate a Western modernity. Instead the nationalists sought a different modernity (Prakash 1999), ‘our modernity’ (Chatterjee 1997). As Deshpande (2003: 47) argues,

Modernity was the object of intense desire, at the very least because it promised resources with which the marks of colonial subjugation could be erased and equality claimed with the erstwhile masters. It was also the source of extreme anxiety because it seemed to threaten any distinctive (non-Western) identity – which was the only proof of true equality with (rather than mere mimicry of) the West. Hence the desperate desire not just for modernity, but a distinctive modernity.

Thus, nationalist modernization involved “the embedding of modernity in a reconstructed body of traditions” (Osella & Osella 2000: 258) in order to create a modernity that was, and still is, substantially Indian.

This Indian modernity, it is argued, differed from Western models in its approach to science (Prakash 1999), and in its less individualistic view of personhood and fraternity (Chakrabarty 2008; Nandy 1988; Raychaudhuri 1988). It was also, according to Partha Chatterjee (1993), a distinctly public modernity as the home became cordoned off as the domain of 'Indian tradition'. Chatterjee has argued that the Indian nationalists constructed a division between an outer, public domain of colonial control and modern western-style institutions, and an inner domain of culture defined in terms of spiritual and family values believed to be distinctively Indian. It was this inner spiritual *Indian* domain that was to form the basis for a national identity. As the private sphere was seen as the domain of women, they became the bearers of 'tradition' (see Chapter 5). While men were expected to adjust their dress and behaviour to suit the labour market, similar changes for women were far more laden with moral judgement as they were seen as a violation of 'Indian tradition'.

The notion of a category of 'Indian tradition' was a middle-class construct involving ideas of *scientific* and *rational* spirituality, and the assertion of a reformist, Brahmanical, Sanskritic and caste-centric Hinduism as the 'authentic' tradition (van der Veer 2001; Fuller 2004b). It was nevertheless an important means through which the colonial middle classes were able to manage ambivalent attitudes toward the West. During this period the modern was an object of desire, but also posed the threat of Westernization. This resulted in attempts to construct a distinctively Indian modernity that allowed for the retention of aspects of 'Indian tradition'.

The Post-Independence Middle Classes

The drive for independence and the period of Nehru's rule in many ways represent the heyday of the educated middle class. In the early decades of post-independence India the middle class remained dependent on the state in the form of state-subsidized higher education, state employment and the state-managed model of economic planning and development (Fernandes 2006: 20-1). Through their leadership of the freedom movement and the Congress Party (Varma 1998), they not only played the pivotal role in the shaping the modern Indian nation, but also cemented a reputation for idealism, particularly in relation to democracy, secularism and nationalism. According to Dwyer (2000: 74) the period of Nehru's rule "is looked back to as a golden age for the professional and intellectual middle classes, a time of high morality".

Independence and the economic development it helped nurture facilitated the expansion of the mercantile middle classes. The role of the Congress Government in furthering industrialization and economic development and the emergence of the 'Licence Raj' would have forced some collaboration and a limited rapprochement between the two middle class worlds. According to Markovits (2003), it is likely that these groups shared many values during this period, including devaluation of conspicuous consumption, and emphasis on thrift, self-denial, sexual morality and a puritanical work ethic.

Across India, a new agrarian bourgeoisie built up political and economic clout through the 1960s and then began to acquire some of the accessories enabling greater social recognition, particularly education in better schools and material goods. With the arrival of television in the countryside around the early and mid-seventies a significant segment of rural India began to aspire to middle-class status (Varma 1998: 95). Carol Upadhyia (1988; 1997) describes the emergence of this agrarian bourgeoisie in coastal Andhra Pradesh and their increasing participation in urban life. In this area, the pre-independence construction of irrigation systems, subsequent commercialization of agriculture and investment in agro-business and education led to a pattern of “rural-urban migration, rural-urban kin ties, and inter-penetration of business and agriculture and of rural and urban property interests” (Upadhyia 1988: 1380). The complex web of ties between rural and urban society produced an urban-oriented culture (dowry and marriage patterns, lifestyle, manners, consumption patterns, language and interests) among the rural elite, which in turn reproduced the pattern of out-migration as town life and urban occupations (particularly the professions and white-collar occupations) became more highly valued by the rural elite than ‘boring’ rural life and cultivation. These patterns intensified following the Green Revolution which strengthened capitalist tendencies in the agrarian economy.

Although wealth and not caste is the determinant of the type of entrepreneurship engaged in by farmer-capitalists, this class has strong caste dimensions to it. In Andhra Pradesh, families with sufficient wealth have predominantly come from the dominant cultivating castes such as Kamma, Reddy, Kapu and Raju, and caste-based resource networks have been an important form of social capital that increase the chance of business success (Upadhyia 1988; 1997). Kammas, for example, use caste membership as a resource for building business networks, clinching lucrative contracts, or getting access to segments of the government bureaucracy. Exclusion from caste-based social networks can thus also amount to exclusion from the regional capitalist class. Nevertheless, this process was not exclusive to rich land-owning castes; by the late 1970s and early 1980s state-sponsored development, the Green Revolution strategy and the availability of education in rural society began to result in the emergence of an educated peasant middle class from some OBC castes. With their newfound wealth, members of these castes were able to enter the rural credit system, co-operatives and small business, and reservations enabled educated youth from these castes to gain employment in educational institutions and in the State bureaucracy (Srinivasulu 2002: 13).

Under Nehru’s rule, modernity was understood in terms of development and was based on the principles of democracy, federalism, socialism and secularism. Nehru sought to implement his view of modernity through industrialization, science and planning (which he saw as a scientific instrument of social change) driven by “state-bureaucratic agency” (Kaviraj 1984: 225; see also Chatterjee 1993 [1986]; Corbridge & Harriss 2000; Prakash 1999: 234). Reproducing a widely accepted view of Nehru’s approach to modernity, Sudipta Kaviraj (2000: 155) suggests Nehru “believed that to rescue people from tradition, their intellectual and practical habitus, all that was needed was to simply

present a modern option; peoples' inherent rationality would do the rest". The idea of modernization thus "took on the dimensions of a national mission" (Deshpande 2006: 175).

Although conducted very recently, and so a poor reflection of the period immediately following independence, Jonathan Parry's (2004) study of long-distance migrants to the Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP) provides some insight into the extent to which a specifically Nehruvian modernization rhetoric has been internalized by the population. BSP was one of a handful of megaprojects which were designed to realize the Nehruvian dream of a modern, self-reliant, secular India and abolish centuries of backwardness by kick-starting a new era of industrial modernity. It was "as much about forging a new kind of society as about forging steel" (Parry 2004: 220-1). Parry found that many BSP workers had internalized these ideas about Bhilai and its steel plant and took pride in having joined the 'modern' world. Even when they would be materially better off in the village, many workers did not return as they saw the village as a backward, narrow and oppressive 'waiting room', characterized by illiteracy, bigotry and lack of civilization. This suggests a desire for the modern understood in terms of material development, 'civilization' and education or knowledge.

Nevertheless, ambivalence in attitudes toward tradition and modernity, Indian and Western remains evident in accounts of the Indian middle classes in the decades following independence (Deshpande 2003: 35). In *When a Great Tradition Modernizes*, Milton Singer (1972) asks whether the Great Tradition of Sanskrit Hinduism is secularized and replaced by a modernizing ideology in urban contexts such as Madras. He observed that upper-caste families and individuals tended to *compartmentalize* their lives. The spatial, temporal and social separation of personal and professional lives enabled people to manage the contradictions of modernity, to modernize without abandoning tradition. A 'modern' model was followed in a ritually neutralized work sphere, while domestic and social life continued to adhere to 'traditional' models. In order to be incorporated in the domestic sphere, new or foreign objects, practices and values need to be gradually 'traditionalized' by being first introduced into a 'neutral' area such as the workplace, before being integrated into the repertoire of 'indigenous tradition' (Singer 1972: 387). Singer (1972: 406) concludes that "The old dichotomy of traditional and modern societies and the alleged linear laws of development that inexorably transform traditional into modern types of society have not been supported by the highly differentiated picture beginning to emerge from recent research".

This notion of compartmentalization is a useful one, not least because of its similarities with other ways of thinking about social change in South Asia such as Chatterjee's description of the differences between public and private spheres during the nationalist movement. As Deshpande (2003: 37) argues, the "theme of the coexistence of 'discrete' sectors in a single person, family or other social group is a common one in the literature on modernization in India, and, indeed, in the conversational anecdotes of everyday life". Again and again we see this contextual adoption of aspects understood to be modern or, to a lesser extent, Western. Thus, for the Indian middle classes

during this time, as in the colonial period, an Indian modernity that allowed for the contextual performance of (re-imagined) 'Indian tradition' was sought.

The Post-Liberalization Middle Classes

By the 1980s a sense that the state had failed to deliver on its promises of the benefits of modernity was becoming pervasive among the middle classes. Contrary to the master narrative of modernization, as democratic awareness spread to the lower strata of society, politics had become increasingly based on 'communal' ties (Kaviraj 2000). A 'crisis of secularism' was evident in the rise of the Hindu-nationalist BJP and the events surrounding the demolition of the temple at Ayodhya. At the same time, the rise of caste politics and the events surrounding the Mandal Commission disrupted conventional models of democracy, and the liberalization of the economy in the 1990s marked the end of Indian socialism. This led members of the elite and middle classes to contest many of the modernizing ambitions of the early post-colonial state. Corbridge and Harriss describe these changes as an 'elite revolt', arguing that modern India has been reinvented through the deliberate assertions of the middle class "against modern India's mythologies of rule (explicitly against socialism and federalism and secularism), and against the popular forces that those mythologies have encouraged (and hence, less explicitly, against democracy)" (2000: 120).

No longer able to operate behind the scenes as the silent beneficiaries of state-led development, the middle classes became more assertive and visible as they began to construct themselves in opposition to the state (Fernandes 2006: 27). When Rajiv Gandhi came into power, he replaced a Nehruvian model of development, symbolized by dams and factories with a vision of modernization through high technology, managerial efficiency and global economic competitiveness symbolized by commodities. As Brosius (2010: 74) argues, "it is now the new residential colonies with lakes and golf courses, and glass-bodied skyscrapers reflecting business (wo)men in western suits, equipped with laptops and BlackBerry phones that shape the globalized imaginary of 'New India'". The relationship between the state and the middle classes was re-forged in terms of links between middle-class aspirations, consumption practices, and policies of economic reform (Fernandes 2006: 35-38). Nevertheless, the middle class remained dissatisfied with parliamentary democracy and began to construct themselves as "victimized both by a corrupt and ineffective political system on the one hand and the supposedly privileged and protected working classes on the other" (Fernandes 2006: 187).

These changes are often interpreted as part of the rise of a 'new middle class' who are contrasted with the old English-educated middle class. While the old middle class are said to have more cultural capital than economic capital, the opposite is said to be true of the new middle class. According to such narratives, the old middle class have lost a significant amount of political power and their values are being contested by the new middle classes who generate much of India's public

culture (Dwyer 2000: 91). The dominance of new middle-class values is seen in a shift in middle-class aspirations from the old middle-class cultural and economic standard of a job in a state bank or Indian civil service to new middle-class desires for a job in a multinational corporation or foreign bank (Fernandes 2006: 92). Nevertheless, the old educated middle classes remain an important reference point when evaluating, usually negatively, the lifestyles and values of the new middle classes.

Although the rise of the 'new middle class' has been widely cited as a success of the post-liberalization economy, and the contrasts between old and new middle classes described above are widely accepted, recent scholarship shows strong connections between the old and the new. Leela Fernandes (2006: 89) asserts that "the new middle class is not comprised of new entrants to middle class status". Rather, this category is defined by new middle-class employment aspirations. Jan Nijman (2006) provides support for this critique of the notion that the newness of the middle class lies in its expanded membership by showing that upward mobility in Mumbai has occurred primarily from lower to higher sectors of the middle class rather than from poor to middle class. He locates the newness of the Indian middle classes in practices of credit-based consumption. It thus appears that the post-liberalization 'new' middle class are not newly middle-class families, but rather already middle-class families who have found new ways of being middle class that involve changing orientations toward the state, employment and consumption (see also Radhakrishnan 2011a: 43).

In terms of local attitudes toward the West and the modern, growing ambivalence is evident. While disillusionment with state-led development led to more capitalist visions of an Indian modernity, these visions were also subject to attack for ignoring the fundamental principles of modernity. Gupta's *Mistaken Modernity* (2000) provides some insight into the discourses of tradition and modernity circulating in post-liberalization India. Gupta defines modernity as "an attitude which represents universalistic norms, where the dignity of an individual as a citizen is inviolable and where one's achievement counts for more than family background or connections" (2000: 8). He argues that India's elitist middle class have become 'westoxicated' – they mistakenly associated modernity with "symbols of technological progress, such as cars, gadgets, frequent travels abroad, and so forth" and superficially display these symbols. Meanwhile India remains decidedly unmodern, by his definition, as the middle classes resist losing their privileges. Gupta asserts that, although not an unadulterated 'good', modernity is "still infinitely preferable to tradition" which "stifled individual initiative, gave no room for self-expression and permanently debased large numbers of people who were locked in an unyielding social hierarchy" (Gupta 2000: 9-10). Gupta differentiates westoxication from westernization, which involves "the establishment of universalistic norms and the privileging of achievement over birth" (2000: 21). In doing so he equates modernity and Westernization.

Modernity, then, becomes increasingly problematic as an object of desire. The model of modernity as (national state-led) development becomes tainted by the notion that this is an impossible project, and modernity newly conceived as market-driven development indexed by

privatized consumer lifestyles is criticized as self-interested hedonism. Nevertheless, an idealized version of modernity may still be highly valued.

Ethnographic accounts of post-liberalization India, and South Asia more generally, continue to highlight the tension between the modern and the traditional, the local national culture and that of the West in the lives of middle-class South Asians. In contrast to earlier emphases on compartmentalization and context, more recent studies tend to frame this tension in terms of balance and limits. South Asians, we are told, have to limit the extent to which they subscribe to ‘modern’ lifestyles. They strive to be ‘suitably modern’ (Liechty 2003) or ‘appropriately Indian’ (Radhakrishnan 2011a); they distance themselves from backwardness, but too much modernity poses a threat to their decency and respectability.

Mark Liechty (2003), for example, provides a vivid account of changing middle-class culture in Kathmandu. He argues that “a ‘Western’ model or image of modernity is simultaneously the object of intense local desire and always out of reach, seemingly by definition an unachievable condition in the non-West” (ibid.: xi). His participants’ desire for a ‘Western’ modernity was not only tempered by its unavailability but also by local pressures to adhere to core social and religious values that dictated notions of propriety. Liechty describes the ways in which his middle-class participants attempted to appear ‘suitably modern’ through daily balancing acts between meanings and experiences of ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’.

The transnational IT professionals studied by Radhakrishnan (2011a) engage in a comparable process of ‘cultural streamlining’ whereby practices coded as ‘Indian culture’ are transformed into a stable, transferable, modular set of norms and beliefs, that she describes as ‘appropriate difference’. This ‘appropriate Indianness’ is self-consciously distinct from ‘Western culture’ and yet compatible with it. Transnational IT professionals constructed themselves as maintaining an ‘Indian’ core while adopting the professional persona required for a ‘global work culture’. Becoming ‘global’ was valued as long as it did not mimic the West or threaten notions of a ‘good woman’ and a ‘good family’.

Caroline and Filippo Osella’s exploration of social mobility among Izhavas in Kerala, “a determinedly modern self-fashioning and reflexive community” (2000: 247), sheds further light on such negotiations of tradition and modernity. The Osellas discuss how modernity and social mobility, or ‘progress’, have become internalized as part of Izhava self-identity as they consciously position themselves as modern. The two key reference points for Izhavas in their efforts for social mobility are local Christians who are seen as “proponents of and adherents to rational modernity and innovation – hard work, thrift, material success” and high-caste Nayars, seen as “adherents to ‘tradition’ and the maintenance of the good things of the past – ‘culture’, religious observance, *dharmā*” (Osella & Osella 2000: 249). Thus, while distancing themselves from the ‘backwardness’ of illiteracy and low-caste cultural practices through education and religious reform, Izhavas must be cautious of too much ‘modernity’ (working women, love marriages) which threatens to undermine the ‘Hindu’ identity necessary for caste mobility.

According to Gardner and Osella (2004: xxviii) “ideas, hopes and dreams of something called ‘modernity’ and ‘progress’ are continually appealed to in people’s economic endeavours, political projects and identity crafting”. While such ideas, hopes and dreams have played an important role in driving social change in South Asia, so too has traditionalism (Fuller 2004b), a process by which certain practices and artefacts are defined as traditional and preserved for this reason. There are a number of options for understanding the structure and orientation of these changes. One could interpret them as part of the development of a particularly Indian ‘fractured’ modernity (Joshi 2001). Alternatively, one could move away from attempts to measure and define the modernity of Indian middle-class lives and instead seek to understand the processes by which they manage the often conflicting pressures of ‘progress’ and traditionalism. The compartmentalization described by Singer and Chatterjee (see also Gould 1965: 30; Bear 2007: 243-9) highlights the importance of context, particularly the public-private divide, in people’s adoption of traditional/modern, Indian/Western artefacts, ideologies and practices, whereas more recent models use metaphors of balance across all spheres of life.

In this thesis I join these scholars in attending to the importance of context and of balancing competing value systems in the lives of Hyderabad’s middle classes. I describe the ways in which people seek limited, controlled or balanced change and their notion that change is suitable in some contexts but not in others. In many ways I paint a picture of compartmentalization, but unlike Singer I present this not as an innocent adaptation to the contradictions of modernity but as a hegemonic project, a way of performing and talking about social change that serves to reproduce patriarchal relations and class-caste exclusions (Hancock 1999: 14-15, 67). Like Hancock (1999: 245-6), I am concerned with the ways in which gender, caste, class and nation are made and unmade through processes of objectifying, representing and arguing about modernity, tradition, Indian and Western culture. This thesis, then, looks not simply at how people deal with change through discourses and practices of compartmentalization and balance, but also the power of such discourses to naturalize and legitimize gender and class-caste hierarchies.

Towards a Definition of the Indian Middle Classes

In the preceding section I have described different trajectories to middle class status. According to one view the old middle classes, descendents of the middle classes of the colonial period, can be distinguished from the new middle classes who have achieved middle-class status in the post-liberalization economy. An opposing view sees a single trajectory with the old middle classes taking up new middle-class jobs in the private sector and adopting new middle-class forms of cultural distinction. My observations of Hyderabad suggest that in this city three reasonably distinct trajectories to middle-class status are observable. The descendents of the old educated and commercial middle classes tend to live in the more established suburbs of the city such as Ameerpet,

Punjabgutta and Secunderabad. Many of the commercial middle class continue to make a living in business and some of the educated middle classes can still be found in government service and the professions. Many, however, have succeeded in transforming their old middle-class cultural capital into new middle-class employment and have taken advantage of new opportunities in the private sector, particularly in information technology. They regard the newly middle classes as ignorant of how to tastefully and productively spend their money.

Most of the new middle classes in suburban Hyderabad are newly urban, drawn from both rich and poor agriculturalists. They continue the process of rural-urban integration and migration described by Upadhyaya (1988; 1997; see above). In Hyderabad former rich land-owning farmers are involved in small-scale industry, business and, as a result of earlier investment in education, high-level white-collar work.⁴ Newly urbanized landless farmers form an emerging petit bourgeoisie which “has smaller resources of educational, economic and cultural capital but aspires to increase these, through a combination of self-help, education, acquisition of English, saving and consumer choices” (Dwyer 2000: 91). Both sectors of this new middle class tend to live in the new outer suburbs such as Kukatpally and Miyapur where I conducted research.

Although a historical approach gives us a sense of the trajectories different groups have moved along into middle-class status, this is not particularly helpful in determining whether a specific individual or family are middle-class. For this purpose, the most commonly used criterion is income. Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase (2008) state that their lower middle-class informants in Bengal were earning approximately Rs 10,000 (£120) a month in 1999 and double this by the end of their research in 2006. The National Council of Applied Economic Research (Shukla 2010) has at various points in its history talked of ‘middle income households’ earning between Rs 45,000 (£550) and Rs 180,000 (£2200) per year, the consuming class earning between Rs 90,000 (£1100) and Rs400,000 (£4900) per year, and the ‘middle class’ earning between Rs 200,000 (£2450) and Rs 1,000,000 (£12,270) per year. The following table summarizes the class categories used by the NCAER and modified slightly by McKinsey Global Institute in their report on ‘The Rise of India’s Consumer Market’ (Ablett et al. 2007). McKinsey and the NCAER regard ‘seekers’ and ‘strivers’, that is, those who earn between Rs200,000 and Rs 1,000,000 per year, as middle-class. According to the McKinsey Global Institute report, in 2005 there were 101.3 million deprived households (54 per cent of the population), 91.3 million aspirer households (41 per cent), 10.9 million seeker households (4 per cent), 2.4 million striver households, and 1.2 million global households.

⁴ Whether these land-owning farmers were middle-class before they moved to Hyderabad depends on the definition of middle class. Patricia and Roger Jeffery and Craig Jeffrey (2011) argue that rich rural Jats in Uttar Pradesh can be considered middle-class, although the close associations between the urban, the modern and the middle-class make it difficult for them to assert a middle-class status beyond the village.

NCAER Category Name	McKinsey Category Name	Income in Rs/annum	Income in £/annum	Income in Rs/month
Deprived	Deprived	<90,000	<1100	<7500
Aspirers	Aspirers	90,000-200,000	1110-2450	7500-16,670
Seekers	Seekers	200,000-500,000	2450-6140	16,670-41,670
Strivers	Strivers	500,000-1,000,000	6140-12,270	41,670-83,330
Near Rich	Globals	1-2 million	12,270-24,540	83,330-166,670
Clear Rich		2-5 million	24,540-61,350	166,670-416,650
Sheer Rich		5-10 million	61,350-122,700	416,650-833,300
Super Rich		>10 million	>122,700	>833,300

TABLE 5: NCAER and McKinsey Income Brackets

These categories give some indication of the financial parameters of the Indian middle classes, but in their economic reductionism give little indication of the complex range of factors that constitute middle-class lives.

Most scholars bemoan the inadequacy of income-based definitions (e.g. Bêteille 2003). As Fernandes (2006: 91) argues, such measurements of the middle classes overlook the importance of converting between different forms of capital – social, cultural, symbolic and economic – in strategies to achieve, maintain or improve middle-class status. Another common criterion is occupation. The distinctions between manual and non-manual labour and between a salary and wages are often identified as important (Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase 2008: 11), but the lines between these categories are becoming increasingly blurred. I found in Hyderabad that occupational data were generally meaningless, as people with very different incomes and lifestyles used the same generic job title to describe themselves. For example, the label ‘businessman,’ used by many, gives little indication of the size and profitability of the business and the social status that might be attached to the position.

Many have suggested that the Indian middle classes are constituted in large part through consumption, but this has seldom been worked into lists of consumables that can be regarded as criteria for middle-class status. This is complicated by the fact that middle-class consumption patterns are very different in India when compared to most post-industrial countries. Although most middle-class Indian families do not own cars and almost none can afford a holiday abroad, many employ servants, which is not the case for middle-class families in more affluent societies (Säävälä 2010: 9). Margit van Wessel (2004: 95-6) provides the following description of the material possessions and consumption habits of the middle classes she studied in Baroda:

A standard middle-class residence is made of brick and is neatly plastered; it contains two, three or more rooms, a separate kitchen with standing platform, indoor plumbing and a space

outside for washing clothes and utensils. Much money is invested in home decorations and appliances. Refrigerators, mixer-grinders, television sets, sofa sets, fans and coolers, and music systems are commonly available, and middle class families can be expected to have at least some of these items in their homes. Most also own vehicles like mopeds, scooters and motorcycles and increasingly purchase cosmetics and packaged foods. Clothing fashions have become increasingly diverse, with more and more teenagers adopting, and being allowed to wear, western fashions. Visits to restaurants, fast-food establishments, and beauty parlours are equally part of a middle-class lifestyle.

Another strategy is to rely on the definitions of informants. Sara Dickey (2000), for example, found in her research with people from different classes in Madurai that although definitions of the rich and the poor depended on the speaker, there was some consensus. Those who identified as poor and were classified as such by others were generally skilled and unskilled labourers or low-level office-workers who experienced a general lack of economic security and had incomes at or near the Indian poverty line. Those who identified as middle- or upper-class were merchants, shop owners, professionals, teachers, government official and large landowners. They were relatively well educated and did not experience financial hardship.

Many scholars writing on South Asia have resisted attempts to define and measure the Indian middle classes, preferring instead to focus on how the middle classes act as a social category or “the social practices and conceptual divisions that people who consider themselves as middle class, or struggle to become middle class, use to determine what new middle classes are” (Säävälä 2010: 10). For example, Mankekar (1999: 367) asserts that what constituted the middle class as such “was their (sometimes self-conscious) differentiation from the working classes and upper classes and ... their aspirations to upward mobility and modernity through consumerism”. Deshpande (2003) defines the middle class in terms of their articulation of the hegemony of the ruling bloc, their dependence on cultural capital, and their production and consumption of ideologies.

I too would like to avoid the material determinism and reductionism involved in definitions based on income and consumption, and I agree that attention to local ideologies expressed in discourse and practices provide a more meaningful understanding of what it means to be middle-class. I devote a considerable portion of the following chapters to a discussion of local discourses of middle class-ness and explore how the middle classes are constructed through practices of caste-denial (Chapter 2), consumption (Chapter 3), education (Chapter 4) and gendered notions of respectability (Chapters 5-7). However, it is important to begin with some sense of the material conditions which facilitate and constrain these ideologies, discourses and practices.

I did not arrive in Hyderabad with a definition of ‘middle class’ but built one over the course of a year. My first step towards a definition involved choosing a lower middle-class and an upper middle-class school through elimination of the poorest schools (government schools) and the richest schools (as indicated by ostentatious infrastructure including air-conditioning). Writing of Hyderabad’s middle classes, Säävälä (2010: 11) adopts a similar strategy:

they are neither labourers nor paupers, nor are they elite; their social being is characterised by being in-between ... This means that they do not have to struggle for daily survival as they have regular means. While on the other hand they are not in decision-making positions, that is, they depend on the political and economic elite for the conditions of their existence.

This definition – not rich and not poor – seemed to be in alignment with local people's understandings of middle class. It was the in-between-ness of the category that they stressed as they positioned the middle-class person as the common man, 'normal'. However, understandings of what incomes constitute rich and poor varied greatly. Almost everyone I spoke to considered themselves middle-class because, as I argue in Chapter 3, doing so enabled them to position themselves as 'normal' and thus righteous. The poorest parents (earning around Rs 5,000 per month) told me that anyone earning more than Rs 20,000 a month was upper class or rich. In contrast, many wealthier parents (some earning as much as Rs 200,000 a month) thought that anyone earning less than Rs 20,000 was poor or lower-class.

By the end of my fieldwork I had a fair sense of lower, middle and upper middle-class 'lifestyle clusters' that included housing, ownership of consumer durables and consumption patterns. I think middle-class Hyderabadis would recognize similar points of distinction – two-wheeler versus four-wheeler, the number of bedrooms in the house, where goods are purchased – but may label the groupings differently assuming their own income and way of life to fall somewhere in the middle. However, as I tried to match income and education to these lifestyles, it quickly became apparent that any kind of standardized generalizing typology could never accurately represent the diversity of lower, middle and upper middle-class lives and that arbitrarily drawing boundaries between certain income or consumer brackets would do little to aid understanding of middle-class Hyderabad. Nevertheless, throughout this thesis I attribute quotes to informants described as lower, middle and upper middle-class in order to highlight differences between different middle-class sectors. Such labels are a necessary shorthand that take the entirety of someone's social, cultural and economic capital into account. The following case studies illustrate the kinds of families to which I attach each of these labels. In order to protect the anonymity of informants, these case studies are composites.

Srinivas and Sunita live along with their son and daughter in a very small one-bedroom apartment in Miyapur. The whitewash is old and discoloured and the rooms are very sparsely decorated with a calendar and a few cheap knick-knacks. The furniture is limited to a bed and a couple of broken plastic chairs. Meals are eaten and homework is done on the floor. They own a fridge, a small old television and a motorbike. On the occasions when I interviewed them Srinivas was wearing an old faded *dhobi* (cloth wrapped around the waist) and white singlet and Sunita was in a long loose nightgown. Srinivas told my research assistant and me in a mix of Telugu and English that his parents had not been to school and that his father had run a series of small businesses – selling fruit, snacks and water bottles at bus stops and then organising tours to pilgrimage sites. Srinivas completed a BTech degree and had been married to Sunita, who had studied till 10th class, when he was 23 and she was 16. He came to Hyderabad for work in 2002 and has since had a series of jobs as

a mechanic, earning around Rs 20,000 a month. Sunita is a housewife and is considering taking work as a tailor.

Srinivas and Sunita buy their groceries at the weekly vegetable market, at road-side stalls and at local 'Kirana' shops (small owner operated corner stores). Their clothing and household goods are similarly purchased at small owner-operated shops in their neighbourhood. Although Srinivas travels to other parts of Hyderabad for work, Sunita and the children leave their suburb only to travel to their 'native places' for festivals and significant family events. The family almost never eats 'outside food' and when they do they get curries or tiffins from local 'curry points' or 'hotels' that sell *dosas* for Rs 14. Their leisure time is spent watching television at home and occasionally visiting the small local cinema. They spend a significant portion of their income on basic necessities and about a third on private English-medium education for their son, in 10th class, and their daughter, at junior college. This investment in education can make it difficult to live comfortably at times. I label Srinivas and Sunita 'lower middle-class'.

Other informants I have labelled lower middle-class include Ravi, the teacher whose story opens this chapter, a machine operator who earns Rs 13,000 per month and has a tenth class education, a woman with an undergraduate degree who runs a Kirana store with her husband, taking in about Rs 10,000 a month, and a housewife with a 9th class education whose husband earns around Rs 9,000 a month working for Coca-cola. With the exception of Ravi, all of these informants speak almost no English. Their living conditions and lifestyles are very similar to those of Srinivas and Sunita. For such families, becoming more securely middle-class is a matter of daily contemplation and struggle.

At the other end of the middle-class scale, are families such as Jaya Krishna's. He lives with his wife and two daughters in an upmarket apartment complex in KPHB called 'Malaysian Township' which has a range of sporting facilities including tennis courts and a swimming pool. Their apartment is very spacious with plush new black leather couches, gleaming wooden dining furniture and air-conditioning in both bedrooms. When I interviewed Jaya Krishna he wore smart trousers, a crisp new shirt and closed leather shoes. He described his caste as 'OC' – Other Caste, i.e., not entitled to any reservations – and told me that his grandparents had been uneducated 'agriculturalists', but his father had received his Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) and worked in a local government position. Jaya Krishna completed a Bachelor of Science degree and then did a postgraduate diploma in instrumentation and electronics. He speaks fluent but very 'Indianized' English. Jaya Krishna moved to Hyderabad after completing his education and had an arranged marriage four years later. His wife studied till 9th class and speaks almost no English. Jaya Krishna now owns and operates a successful business and makes about Rs 150,000 per month. He drives to work in a car every day. Their older daughter has completed an engineering degree and is now doing her MBA. Their younger daughter's school was chosen for the 'exposure' and 'communication skills' that it claims to provide

and which distinguish it from the less expensive private English-medium schools attended by the lower middle class.



FIGURE 5: Malaysian Township (RamaReddy Vogireddy 2011)

The family shops for clothing in large local department stores and at the malls located in more central suburbs where they spend hours browsing, eat expensive snacks in the food hall and buy a few items of branded or ‘label’ clothing. They buy their groceries mostly in supermarkets. Along with visiting malls, their leisure pursuits include watching films in ‘multiplex’ cinemas (often housed in malls) and eating in restaurants – Indian or international chains such as KFC and Pizza Hut – where they pay several hundred rupees for a meal. Vacations involve trips not only to pilgrimage sites but also to more ‘secular’ tourist destinations; they have visited the beaches of Goa and the Keralan backwaters. The older daughter travels on her scooter to college and to meet her friends for Rs 100 coffees in Café Coffee Day or Barrista. She occasionally goes to ‘pubs’ or bars at night to drink and dance and on weekends she sometimes goes for ‘road trips’ with friends to resorts or temples outside the city.

With an income of Rs 150,000 a month, Jaya Krishna’s family are moving in the direction of elite status and would be classified as ‘near rich’ by the NCAER. Although they are undoubtedly well-off, I classify them as upper-middle class, precisely because they are nearly but not quite rich and because they share many of the ‘middle-class values’ I describe in subsequent chapters. Such families are less thoroughly emerged in a global middle-class culture than those I label ‘elite’ – they have not travelled outside of India except for work and are less ‘in touch’ with international music, media and clothing fashions.

Other upper-middle class informants include a housewife, raised in Hyderabad, with an undergraduate degree and fluent English, dressed always in fashionable *sahvaar kameez* (a long loose shirt and trousers) whose husband earns Rs 110,000 per month in the Indian Air Force; a director of a software company, son of a teacher, also raised in Hyderabad, with an engineering degree and an MBA, who earns 'more than one lakh' (Rs 100,000) per month; a general manager with an MA in economics, who came to Hyderabad in 1985 and now earns Rs 140,000 per month; a housewife with an MBA whose husband earns Rs 100,000 a month as a software engineer; and a teacher, raised in Hyderabad, who earns only Rs 12,500 a month but whose husband earns over Rs 100,000. All of these informants are fluent in English.

Between Srinivas and Sunita's family and that of Jaya Krishna, are Vidya and Shyam whose combined income of Rs 70,000 per month places them in the NCAER category of 'strivers', the wealthier of their two middle-class categories. Shyam works as a civil engineer and Vidya, who has a BA, works as a primary school teacher. Both Shyam and Vidya speak some English and think their job prospects would be improved by having better English, especially Vidya who aspires to a higher paying job in an 'international' school. Although their son attends the same school as Jaya Krishna's daughter, they enrolled him before the school began to place such an emphasis on 'exposure' and 'communication skills' and were attracted less by the different teaching methods than by the large grounds.

They live with their son in a two bedroom apartment in a small building in KPHB. The walls are freshly painted, the cushions on the wooden couches look relatively new and the cabinet in the living area houses a large television and an impressive collection of rather gaudy knick-knacks including plastic flowers and large dolls dressed in ball gowns. Household appliances include a microwave, a washing machine and a refrigerator. The family own a scooter, which Vidya uses, a motorbike on which Shyam travels to work every day, and a car used for family outings. They are planning to buy an air-conditioner for the master bedroom, but may have to put this off as their son is starting college soon and wants his own motorbike.

Shyam and Vidya buy their clothing and groceries at local stores similar to those used by Sunita and Srinivas, but also shop at large department stores and occasionally get groceries from a supermarket. Last year they visited a mall for the first time to buy clothes for the wedding of a close family member. They enjoyed the visit but were shocked by some of the clothing worn by others there and found the shops expensive. As well as travelling to their ancestral villages or 'native places', the family also visits pilgrimage sites such as Tirupati during vacation times. They occasionally eat at restaurants or get takeaways, but usually at places that cost little more than Rs 100 per person.

Although they have certain attributes that might suggest upper middle-class status, such as a car, their consumption and leisure activities are restrained. Their style of dress and home decor (trinkets and knick-knacks) are part of a lower to middle middle-class style intended to give maximum 'effect' at minimum cost (Bourdieu 1984: 379-80) in contrast to the slick black leather furniture and

minimal decoration of the upper middle class. I would classify them and families like them as middle middle-class.

Of course some families sit somewhere between the three that I have described and cannot be slotted easily into one of the three middle-class sectors. The point here is not to achieve any precision in demarcating categories and assigning labels but rather to understand how people with different resources compete for status and legitimacy and in doing so continuously negotiate and redefine the boundaries of middle-class status. This requires us to accept that such discrete class locations exist only at the level of analytic convenience. In subsequent chapters I explore how the different resources described here are put to use and emerge from continuous everyday practices of class-making.

2

Caste-Inflected Class

Srinu, the father of a Riversdale tenth class student, is a member of the Kamma caste and has attached different levels of significance to caste at different points in his life. He said, “I have gone through a phase when I didn’t believe in the caste system at all; then I went through a phase when I was completely immersed in the caste system and then came out again.”⁵ When he was at school, Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) students were not allowed to sit next to him and his teacher used different language when talking to them. As a child he was told, “You have to play only with this group of students. SC or ST are not allowed to play with you.”

During his undergraduate studies Srinu was an active member of the Students’ Federation of India which is affiliated to the Communist Party of India and discourages caste sentiment. He stayed with SC students from his ‘native place’ and cooked food with them. At this time he did not have any ‘caste feeling.’ After completing his undergraduate degree, Srinu went to Andhra University for postgraduate studies. When he first arrived, he went to the room he had been allocated in university accommodation and was met by a group of students. They asked for his name and native place. Their third question was ‘What is your caste?’ These students told Srinu that that particular row of rooms was not for his caste and that his “caste people” were accommodated elsewhere. Throughout his postgraduate studies he found that when he went to class or did anything on campus people saw him through the lens of caste. He was influenced by this and “also got into caste.”

Srinu moved to Hyderabad after his studies. Initially he had something of a caste “hangover,” but over a period of a few years he slowly “came out of it” and now does not see any merit in the caste system. He did not tell his son what caste the family belongs to and they do not attend functions organized by Kamma caste associations. He has not lost all ‘caste feeling,’ however. He said, “For me it’s not that I don’t believe at all in it, but it is purely personal. If it is something to do with your own family, you need to give some importance to your caste. It is like giving importance to your own family.” He explained that in other matters none of his decisions are influenced by the caste system, but he is not so “progressive” as to discard caste in his personal life as well. He would not accept an inter-caste marriage for his son without hesitation because cultural differences may make it difficult for the daughter-in-law to bond with and adjust to his family. While his parents would not have accepted an inter-caste marriage under any circumstances, caste feeling is sufficiently “diluted” for Srinu that he would eventually accept his son’s decision after his initial hesitation. He thinks that in 20 to 30 years’ time parents might not even experience that hesitation.

⁵ All ‘quotes’ from Srinu are close approximations of what was said based on notes taken during the interview, i.e., the interview was not audio-recorded and transcribed.

According to Srinu, “This generation is far, far better than our generation.” He thinks that caste is no longer observable in urban schools and people make friends “based on their common thinking and matching wave-length irrespective of caste, community and religion.” Many students, Srinu believes, are not aware of their caste until around eighth or ninth class. Some do not know the caste of their school friends until tenth class when they have to write their caste on official exam-registration forms and members of lower castes have to submit caste certificates to prove their eligibility for reserved seats in junior colleges. Despite perceiving caste to be relatively insignificant in contemporary urban India, Srinu believes that caste “is still there in our mind; we still see SCs and STs as a little different from others.”

Srinu’s story of his fluctuating ‘caste feeling’ incorporates a number of themes common to my informants’ narratives and to other scholarly work on the changing significance of caste today. Srinu is critical of an excessively strong attachment to caste, to a hierarchical approach to caste that necessitates avoidance of lower castes and to caste-influenced behaviour in the public realm. He tells a story of an overall decline in the strength and pervasiveness of caste sentiment, but evaluates positively private efforts to maintain caste as a cultural community. In this chapter I seek to understand what such stories tell us about the ideological basis of caste, the arenas in which it has empirical effects and, in particular, the relationship between caste and class.

For the purposes of contrast one could posit abstracted and reductionist forms of caste and class – the former a closed hierarchy of ascribed religious status based on the opposition between the pure and the impure, the latter an open secular system of achieved status based on education, occupation and income. One could hypothesize that in the past status in India was predominantly determined by caste criteria whereas in contemporary urban India class concerns take precedence. In reality, however, the distinction between caste and class is far less clear cut; they have always been and remain today closely intertwined. Disregarding for the moment the inadequacies of the above definition of class and the fact that the caste system has never been completely closed (Fuller 1996: 6; Dirks 1992; Srinivas 1992 [1966]), I will consider here the relationship between purity and power.

For Dumont (1980) the political and economic aspects of caste are secondary and isolated, such that the Brahmin, representing the highest form of purity, is superior to the Kshatriya/king, who represents the profane political world. Others have challenged the notion that the purity-impurity opposition defines the whole caste system and is separable from power relations. They assert that subordination within the caste system is also defined by feudal servitude and dependence, and that the significance of these different idioms of subordination – ritual impurity and feudal service – differs according to the context such that there is no universally applicable ranking system of castes (Dirks 1976; 1987; Raheja 1988; Burghart 1978; Fuller 2004a: 16-20). Mosse (1999: 67), for example, argues that Dalits perform negative ritual roles “*because* they are socially subordinate. This polluting work contributes to their inferior social identity. Purity and power are inseparable.” Untouchable caste identity is, for Mosse, constituted by dependence and service. At the opposite end

to Dumont on the spectrum of theories of the relationship between caste and class are those that argue that the ideology of pure and impure is merely a screen for the material dimensions of caste that emerge from its client and class relations of production (Meillassoux 1973; Chakravarty 2003). It is not within the scope of this thesis to determine which of these models of caste is most convincing. For the purposes of this chapter it is sufficient to observe that it is certainly the case that there has been in ‘traditional’ India a strong correlation between economic status and caste hierarchies, but in many cases this does not extend to Brahmins. Thus, while the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution is more than a mere mask for social and economic power, it is undoubtedly closely intertwined with such power. Untouchability, then, is a problem of economic and social deprivation as well as a problem of perceived ritual pollution (Deliège 2010: 14); both servitude and ritual pollution are the root and manifestation of low-caste status and identity (Fuller 1996).

With this skeleton of a ‘traditional’ caste system in place, more specific questions emerge as to its contemporary form. To what extent is caste still perceived and enacted as a hierarchy based on purity and pollution? Do the cleavages of caste and class tend to run along the same grooves such that the most materially disadvantaged are those at the bottom of caste’s religious hierarchy? In other words, are we seeing a shift from a system of cumulative inequality, i.e. for Dalits, low ritual status, severe economic deprivation and no political power, to one of dispersed inequalities (Béteille 1996b; Deliège 2010)? If the lowest castes continue to be the most deprived, is this a product of their history of material deprivation or continued pollution-based prejudice? Rather than providing clear answers to these questions, the material that follows will demonstrate their limited utility in illuminating practices of subordination and domination in middle-class Hyderabad due to the difficulty of separating class and caste. It is certainly possible to talk about the concepts of caste and class as distinct, and we can all imagine a working-class Brahmin and an elite Dalit. For the vast majority of people, however, despite the different bases of the concepts, the actual way caste and class are deployed in practice runs them together so systematically that it makes little sense to pull them apart.

Correlations between Caste and Class Status

It is a well-documented fact that in contemporary urban India, caste and class hierarchies continue to map onto each other to a large extent. This holds true among my research participants – upper middle-class participants are overwhelmingly upper-caste, while there are many who identified as ‘BC’ (i.e., OBC) among my lower middle-class participants. The following table shows caste and income details for both Riversdale and St Catherine’s parents who were either interviewed or responded to a survey. St Catherine’s parents were unfortunately less responsive to the survey, hence the under-representation of lower middle-class families. Nevertheless, the trend is clear – higher caste families are more likely to be wealthy than lower caste families.

INCOME (Rs/month)	OBC		FORWARD CASTE	
	N	%	N	%
<10,000	3	23	2	3
10,000-29,999	5	38	24	24
30,000-79,999	4	31	18	31
80,000-149,999	1	8	19	33
150,000>	0	0	5	9
TOTAL	13	100	58	100

TABLE 6: Income and Caste for Interviewees and Survey Respondents

Further support for a correlation between caste and class can be found in the much greater percentage of Forward Caste and much lower percentage of OBC students at upper middle-class Riversdale than at lower middle-class St Catherine's. As Tables 2 and 3 in the Introduction indicate, at Riversdale about 85 per cent of students are 'other' or 'forward' caste and 11 per cent are OBC, while at St Catherine's only 33 per cent of students are FC and 28 per cent are OBC.⁶

The correlation between caste and class tells us very little about the nature of caste today, however. We do not know whether lower castes are materially disadvantaged today because they have always been so in the past or whether discrimination on the basis of pollution continues to limit their opportunities in the present. In other words, is it their poverty or their caste that inhibits social mobility? According to Delègue, poverty is overwhelmingly the most significant factor. Referring to the advantage conferred by reservation, he argues that all other things being equal, a member of a Scheduled Caste is more likely to be able to improve his or her class status (2010: 24). I now turn to a consideration of caste prejudice and caste favouritism in Hyderabad in an attempt to establish whether low ritual status has a negative effect on people's ability to achieve status separate from class-based inhibitors of social mobility.

The De-legitimization of Caste in Public Life

Accounts of caste in contemporary urban India tend to stress the degree to which it is denied (Fuller 1996: 21), submerged (Dickey 2000), hidden (Fernandes 2006: 167) and delegitimized (Béteille 1996a; Béteille 2003), particularly in public life. Sara Dickey (2000: 467) writes of the South Indian town of Madurai, "Most people have absorbed the government denunciation of caste discrimination to the extent that they know they are supposed to believe that caste is not socially significant". Similarly, in suburban middle-class Hyderabad, where the most notable thing about caste was its apparent absence, caste was not something that people talked about openly. Of all of the questions I asked during my time in Hyderabad (with the exception of questions about sex), those about caste were

⁶ Although non-Hindus were included in the 'other' category at Riversdale, they constitute a very small number of students and are unlikely to have made a difference of more than one per cent.

most frequently met with discomfort and occasionally a refusal to answer. A female teacher at Riversdale joked that if I asked any questions about caste or religion she and her friends would answer ‘no comment’.

Informants regarded ‘caste feelings’ very negatively. They used this phrase to refer to a strong identification with one’s caste, a desire to further their interests at the expense of other castes, as well as feelings of caste superiority. They were generally critical of those who behaved toward others on the basis of their caste, something they associated with villagers, politicians, the elderly and others who were ‘narrow-minded’ and did not know any better. Caste feelings were actively discouraged in some contexts. At Riversdale, the upper middle-class school, the caste of students was not recorded at the time of enrolment and students were not allowed to use caste surnames such as Chowdhury (Kamma). Many students claimed not to know the name of the caste to which they belong or at least not to know where they are ranked in the structure of hierarchy. There was no explicit system for discouraging the formation of caste identities at St Catherine’s and teachers were slightly less cautious about talking about caste. For example, a couple of elderly Brahmin teachers told me that they were natural teachers because their caste is the most learned and intelligent, and a young recently married Vaishya teacher told me that she had struggled to find a suitably attractive husband because people in her caste tend to be short, stout and dark-skinned. However, I did not knowingly observe instances at St Catherine’s in which caste influenced people’s behaviour toward each other (although, see below for one possible example).

Participants were unanimous in telling me that it was no longer appropriate to ask someone their caste directly (see also Säävälä 2010: 77). While it is, people say, sometimes possible to identify someone’s caste by their name, by their eating habits and practices of religious observance and, according to some, by their physical appearance, many people worked and studied with people whose castes they were unable to identify. Participants highlighted this caste anonymity when asserting the contemporary irrelevance of caste in urban India.

Participants suggested that the strength and pervasiveness of caste feelings were reducing with each passing generation. A handful of young people told me that their parents discouraged any caste sentiment whatsoever. For example, a male Riversdale student recounted how his father had scolded him when he put up a picture of a lion, the symbol of the Kamma caste, in his room. However, most young people described some caste feeling in their parents in contrast to their own complete disinterestedness. These parents in turn contrasted their own relaxed attitude toward caste with the fairly strict observance of caste purity and pollution practices among their parents. Some believed that these generational changes were an indication that caste would one day be meaningless: “It’s changing. When our generation comes into my parents’ age, caste will be rubbish. It will be no more than your surname”* (Male Riversdale student). Most thought the direction of change was less clear and that caste would continue to have importance at least in the field of politics and in the form of ‘reservations’, a quota system whereby a percentage of Government and public sector posts as well as

seats in public and private educational institutions are reserved for members of SC, ST and OBC groups (see below). Nevertheless, all agreed that caste was declining in significance.

All participants asserted the primacy of status distinctions – education, occupation and income – that cut across caste. As in Dickey's (2002: 216) research, all interviewees said that class, expressed in terms of money or education, had a greater impact on their life opportunities than did caste. When I asked people whether caste or money were more important for status in contemporary India, money was the unanimous answer. Evaluations of caste were not wholly negative, however. As was evident in Srinu's comments, some participants valued some form of caste solidarity. Some degree of attachment to caste was generally presented as socially acceptable and unavoidable:

Everybody is interested to improve their caste. That is one kind of human psychology, everyone will have an interest in their own caste. It will be there in the blood. If you say 'he is our caste,' naturally some feeling will be there* (Upper middle-class Riversdale father, Brahmin).

People don't talk openly about caste. But they think about it ... When people meet for the first time they won't ask about the other person's caste, but when they leave they'll wonder what caste the other person belonged to* (Middle middle-class Riversdale father, Kshatriya).

The above discussion indicates that caste differences are very rarely openly and publicly accepted as a natural hierarchy in suburban middle-class Hyderabad, as has been observed elsewhere in India (Béteille 2003: 79). In denying caste, middle-class Hyderabadis display their knowledge of accepted social mores. Regardless of the actual significance of caste in daily life, it is important in positioning oneself as middle-class to declare that caste is irrelevant. In doing so informants signal that they are 'progressive' and 'secular' (these words were frequently used by informants), and also that they are not personally 'marked' by caste. According to Beverley Skeggs (1997: 7), "[t]o think that class does not matter is only a prerogative of those unaffected by the deprivations and exclusions it produces." The same can be said of caste in Hyderabad where denial of caste is only possible for those with upper-caste status. Making caste invisible is part of ensuring the upper-caste-ness of middle-class identity and culture.

Marriage and the Substantialization of Caste

In the previous section I described a generally negative attitude toward caste as a hierarchical system governed by rules of purity and pollution coupled with a positive evaluation of private feelings of caste solidarity. Establishing whether this indicates a change in the ideological basis of caste, requires consideration of the contexts in which informants perceive caste to have continuing significance. There was strong consensus among participants in relation to the main areas in which caste remains important – villages, marriage and politics – and of these three marriage was the one about which they had most to say. Although some people claimed not to have any preference for their children or

for themselves to marry someone of the same caste, most expressed preference for same-caste marriage and a few said they would flatly refuse an inter-caste marriage. The widespread and assumed natural preference for caste endogamy is evident in the fact that a parentally initiated inter-caste marriage remains a contradiction in terms in middle class Hyderabad. There was a sense that inter-caste marriage was abnormal and needed to be explained. For example, the lower middle-class mother of a St Catherine's student told me: "In case of love marriage I don't mind if it is inter-caste, but if I'm looking for a girl for my elder son I would look in the same caste because I have a huge family and if they question me I will not be able to answer them. If it is in the case of love marriage at least I will be able to say it is because they love each other."*

There was, however, general consensus that the boundaries of caste endogamy were expanding and among my participant group, examples of inter-caste marriage were not hard to find. A Kamma Riversdale teacher's cousin married someone of a different caste in the US and his parents had attended the wedding; a Brahmin Riversdale teacher's cousins had had inter-caste marriages and her aunts and uncles apparently had no problem with this; a Kshatriya Riversdale teacher had married a Brahmin and she and her husband remain close to their families. Everybody I spoke to seemed to know someone who had married out of caste and in all but one instance the couple had not been excommunicated.

A Kshatriya Riversdale mother told me, with her Riversdale daughter translating, that if this daughter marries someone from another caste, she will be 'dead' to her family. When I asked the daughter about this, she said that in her caste people do not usually have love (i.e. inter-caste) marriages because they feel they are a little superior to other castes; they are the kings. This was the only explicitly hierarchical explanation of caste endogamous marriage I heard. By far the most common explanation was what informants referred to as 'culture'. I was told that marriage to someone of the same caste is 'comfortable' (this word was almost always used) because of shared customs:

Of course we tend to prefer our own caste. It's nothing related to religion. It's only about comfort. We get so accustomed to our own way of living it is difficult to adjust to a family from a different caste* (Upper middle-class Riversdale mother, Brahmin).

Everybody prefers arranged marriage, but I don't know how it will be in the future. I think all Indian women prefer that one just because of comfort. It means that boy is in your community so ideas and taste will be same, just comfortable ... If they belong to a different caste or religion it will take time to adjust. In my caste we don't eat meat. If she is ready to adjust to different food habits, OK, but I don't have that sort of comfortableness* (Middle middle-class Riversdale mother, Forward Caste).

A second reason given for marrying within the caste was social stigma. Many people suggested that while parents may have no problem with inter-caste marriage, they would not allow it for fear of society's judgement:

Society is much more concerned than the parents. Maybe the parents want their children to be happy and they want to get their children married to other castes, but because of the society they can't do it* (Upper middle-class female Riversdale student, Forward Caste).

So your community is more worried than your own self. They may say 'Oh this guy has married other person and the girl has married other person'. So it is community. Because of your community you get defensive marrying other-caste person and also social stigma. If you go to attend marriages or go to temple they will try to distance you. That is the reason they don't try to marry other-caste people. That is major reason (Upper middle-class St Catherine's father, Vaishya).

Two pragmatic reasons for preferring someone of one's own caste are evident here: similar expectations about festivals, food habits, and so on, which lessen opportunities for conflict, and avoiding the censure of the 'community' to which you belong.

The concepts of substantialization or ethnification provide frameworks for understanding the continued but relaxed preference for caste endogamy and its explanation in cultural terms. Dumont (1980: 222) described a process of 'substantialization,' by which a *structure* of interdependence between hierarchically ranked castes is replaced by caste as *substance*, "a universe of impenetrable blocks, self-sufficient, essentially identical and in competition with one another".⁷ Having lost its significance as a ritual-status group, caste survives as a kinship-based cultural 'community' (Sheth 1999: 2504) comparable to an ethnic group (Barnett 1975: 158-59). This is a move away from transactionally defined rank to one of culturally defined difference. My participants' justification of caste endogamy in terms of distinctive cultural differences rather than in terms of a purity-based hierarchy is consistent with Dumont's substantialization thesis. The preference for caste endogamy along with assertions that 'society' disapproves of intercaste marriage suggest that this substantialist version of caste is generally positively evaluated. However, the claim made by some participants that caste was of no concern to them in the marriages of their children and efforts to assign blame to 'society' rather than stating a personal preference suggest that substantialist versions of caste may also be losing legitimacy.

Further clarification of how this process works can be achieved by considering Jonathan Parry's criticism of the substantialization thesis. Parry challenges the idea that the caste system is now characterized by an ideological stress on difference. He draws attention to the increasing permeability of caste boundaries and suggests that more plausible than substantialization is a "partial merging' of castes and a decline in their sense of separateness" (Parry 2007: 490). According to Parry "the space that caste occupies, and the degree of 'hegemony' it exercises over the lives of large sections of the population has contracted ... other identity choices have become more readily available and in many contexts these have greater significance than caste" (2007: 491).

⁷ Ishii (2007: 125) has argued that most anthropologists have misunderstood what Dumont meant by substantialization. Be that as it may, the term is now well established in this sense. However, I find that 'ethnification' is a less tendentious and more easily understood term for the same process, so I propose to use the two terms interchangeably.

The processes described by Parry are not necessarily inconsistent with substantialization. First, we are talking here of an *ideology* of difference – people talk about and appear to think about castes as culturally different. This is not to say that castes are *empirically* different. To the contrary, processes of substantialization have been accompanied by the increased heterogeneity *within* caste groups and increased homogeneity *between* castes (Fuller 1996: 13). This was noted by some participants. A female Riversdale staff member and a young male software worker told me that very few people were now following the ‘traditions’ that used to differentiate castes and that, with such similar lifestyles, the culture reason for caste endogamy was no longer valid. These comments may point to a gradual delegitimization of substantialist caste values and/or a gradual extension of the boundaries of difference so that only certain key distinctions remain – vegetarian versus non-vegetarian, SC/ST versus ‘clean’ castes, or backward (reservation-entitled) versus forward castes. Second, there are clearly *degrees* of difference and it is a concept open to contextually varying interpretation. Among those of upper-caste, middle-class status (but not, apparently, among the low-caste poor (Grover 2011: 104), members of a hierarchically proximate caste may be deemed not too different for marriage while cultural similarities that arise from a potential spouse’s education, occupation and income may encourage parents to overlook differences in caste. For example, Margit van Wessel observed that in Baroda, where middle-class people were similarly concerned with cultural compatibility (2001: 104), Brahmins, Baniyas and Patels were regarded as the ‘civilized’ castes and within the limits of these three caste groups, caste did not matter so much as class (ibid.: 124).

Third, although a substantialist discourse of caste may appear to accept equality, degrees of difference are undoubtedly assessed according to caste hierarchies. As Caroline and Filippo Osella (2000) have argued, although castes are increasingly being constructed as ‘communities’ or quasi-ethnic groups, this ‘substantialisation’ does not result in an erosion of hierarchy. Drawing on Bourdieu, they (2000: 254) assert that “there can be no fact without value”. Thus while we may see a partial merging and a decline in sense of separateness in the relations between some castes, substantialist values are pervasive and offer justification for the avoidance of the ‘most different’ castes, i.e., SC/ST. The continued importance of the boundary between SC/ST and other ‘clean’ castes perhaps explains the fact that the single example of excommunication I heard of involved a marriage between a ‘BC’ (officially OBC, Other Backward Classes, but locally interpreted as ‘Backward Castes’) boy and an SC girl.

The example of Kavya, a young Brahmin professional who married a Padmasally man, illustrates the significance of ‘culture,’ the importance of class factors in mitigating large caste differences, and the hierarchical nature of these differences. Kavya and her husband met as students at university. They became increasingly close friends and then secured jobs at the same company. In their last semester, he proposed and she agreed. After they had been working for a year they decided to broach the topic of marriage with their parents. She explained to me: “in the society Brahmins are higher than their caste so OK my father was not happy, but he was like ‘OK’. They were not very

happy but [they thought] 'If she wants. She's in love and she wants to marry that guy.' So there was not much fight in my family." Her husband found it more difficult to convince his family. Kavya thought this was because his family lived in a village and were more 'conservative' than hers who had been living in cities for decades. Kavya's husband's family had already planned for him to marry another girl and were worried that Kavya would not 'understand their culture' because she had a wealthier background and different caste. Diet was a big concern. Kavya described the thoughts of her in-laws:

"They [Kavya's family] are pure vegetarians and we are thick hard core non-vegetarians so how will she [Kavya] prepare non-veg foods? And maybe she will come with some attitude and all. She won't be able to mix.' So that was their [my in-laws'] concern. 'If he [Kavya's husband] married someone from our culture ... keep you happy and keep us happy. She won't have any issues, but this girl might have issues.'

When the parents finally agreed to the match, the customary rituals of arrangement went ahead as normal (with the exception of dowry negotiations). Today Kavya does not believe any of her family members think she made the wrong decision although her mother still asks her not to prepare non-vegetarian food: "She has those kinds of reservations, but otherwise marriage-wise they know that I am doing well and I am happy ... and these days love marriages are a bit common also."⁸

Classified as OBC (Other Backward Classes), the Padmasally caste is very 'different' from Brahmins. Had Kavya's husband not been an attractive, well-dressed, highly educated and very well paid man, Kavya's parents may well have not been willing to consider the match. In this instance similarity in class has outweighed difference in caste. The caste difference is at least in part hierarchical. Kavya refers to a hierarchy when explaining her father's objections, and this hierarchy also underlies some of Kavya's husband's family's reservations that she might have a sense of superiority. The husband's family's concern about Kavya's ability to cook non-veg food suggests, however, that difference is not entirely about hierarchy.

As Chris Fuller (1996: 13) asserts, "the emphasis on difference between castes can still imply an evaluation of that difference in terms of relative status." Indeed, people may describe castes as different in large part because it is no longer socially acceptable to openly speak of castes as unequal. Consideration of other areas of life in which caste matters will shed further light on whether the language of substantialist cultural difference is really one of equality or simply a politically correct way to talk about hierarchized differences.

Where Caste Matters

As mentioned above, participants commonly told me that caste was important in villages, politics and marriage. I did not pursue village caste relations and caste politics, but their significance should not

⁸ The rising number and acceptability of love marriages will be discussed in Chapter 6.

be underestimated. People told me that untouchability and other practices of purity and pollution were still common in villages, but distanced themselves, as progressive urban residents, from such practices and sentiments. Nevertheless, many maintained strong links with their 'native place' and with family members living there. Such people may be relatively relaxed about caste in the city, but are unlikely to interact with other castes in their village and are likely to take the opinions of village relatives into account when making important decisions such as in relation to the marriage of a child. For example, a male Brahmin Telugu teacher at St Catherine's told me that when he goes to his village he gets a 'separate' feeling, a desire to mingle only with his own caste. When he is in the city, he is there for his job and cannot expect to even know the castes of his colleagues. He explained: "Professional is different; personal is different." As a general rule, those who were most distanced from rural life, i.e. their families had lived in urban areas for generations and they no longer had land or relatives in a rural area to visit, expressed least concern for caste. However, most participants were, like the rich farmers of coastal Andhra Pradesh described by Carol Upadhy (1988, 1997), part of a complex web of interconnection between city and village maintained by rural-urban kin ties, rural property interests and the continuous flow of new migrants to the city (see Chapter 1).

The importance of caste in shaping political alliances and voting patterns was taken for granted by participants and has been well documented by scholars (Suri 2002; Srinivasulu 2002). In Andhra Pradesh, a common perception is that politics is in a large part a contest for domination between Reddys and Kammas. People were very critical of the role of caste in politics but did not talk extensively about this and constructed such politics as very removed from their daily lives. Informants had more immediate experience of caste politics in a college or university context and spoke of this a little more. A cousin of a Riversdale student who was at college told me that although everyone has friends of all castes, when it comes to elections they all vote for the person from their caste. She explained: "We feel we are all the same, but when elections come we vote for own caste."* These comments reflect the history of open and sometimes violent caste politics at universities in Hyderabad (Anveshi Law Committee 2002; Gundimeda 2009; Senthilkumar Solidarity Committee 2008) and other parts of India (Guru 2002; Jeffrey 2010: 139). Participants' comments regarding the significance of caste at a State and a college/university level are in accordance with a lot of early work that suggests voting exacerbates and reinforces caste solidarities (e.g. Srinivas 1992 [1966]). Making such an argument convincingly would, however, require an exploration of politics that extends far beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, I focus on caste in contexts that participants described as having more immediate relevance to their daily lives.

Reservations

Beyond villages, marriage and politics, the other aspect of social life most frequently mentioned in relation to caste was reservations. While most participants were reluctant to talk about caste, reservations were a subject about which they were willing to talk frequently and openly. Upper-caste

participants suggested that reservations were problematic as they ensure that caste remains a point of differentiation between people and deny opportunities – jobs and college seats – to more meritorious candidates. Such discussions were usually illustrated with examples of low-caste students with very low marks getting college seats ahead of high-caste candidates with very high marks. For example, a college student complained that he had ranked 5000th in the entrance exams but has in his class an SC student who ranked 70,000th.

The need for affirmative action was never mentioned by upper-caste, upper middle-class participants and occasionally explicitly denied. For example, an upper middle-class Vaishya St Catherine's father complained that the reservation system was supposed to have lasted for only 10 years but has now been in place for 60 years and accounts for 54 per cent of government positions. He said most people are against reservations but they continue as they are a source of votes for politicians. He was adamant that there should not be reservations in India, questioning why someone who got 40 per cent in an exam should get a place over someone who got 90 per cent. He asserted that lower castes were not disadvantaged and gave numerous examples of individuals who had received a good education and high-paying jobs despite the fact that their parents had been poor and uneducated. He asserted that at the very least the government should be measuring the progress that reservations were enabling and should adjust the policy to enable more progress. He also complained that the reservation system is abused – low-caste people who have very high marks choose not to take the reservation seats so the places are left for their less capable caste-mates.

People often talked about the increasing poverty of upper castes and constructed low caste as an advantage. A lower middle-class Brahmin teacher told me that there is preference in India for Scheduled Castes and castes classified as OBC, rather than for Forward Castes (FC), despite the fact that FC people such as herself are also poor. Three young male college students who had graduated from Riversdale nearly two years previously told me that it is easier for an SC person to get a good job and become successful than for an FC person because reservations ensure that SC students are ranked more highly than FC students despite scoring lower marks in exams. They did not think that an SC person would face any difficulties because of his caste. I got the distinct impression that upper-caste participants believed that the 'caste problem' should be solved by simply ignoring it and allowing 'merit' to distribute rewards. According to their logic, if this happened people would cease to differentiate on the basis of caste.

According to Clarinda Still (Forthcoming-b), as discrimination on the basis of caste has been 'de-legitimised', upper castes articulate their superiority using a discourse about affirmative action or 'reservation'. This changing language reflects the fact that today caste struggles have little to do with relative purity as competition over limited economic and political resources has become the central concern (Deliège 2010: 26-28). Although the benefits of reservations for Dalits are very limited, they have high symbolic value for Dalits as a sign of government support and for upper castes as a sign of the state's unfair preferential treatment. Like Still's informants, the middle-class individuals I spoke to

perceived reservations to be a significant advantage disproportionate to the disadvantage experienced by lower castes. Informants implied that the fact that the percentage of students from OBC, SC and ST categories graduating from professional and graduate courses continues to be much lower than their percentage in the population (Upadhyaya 2007: 1865), and the overwhelmingly upper-caste composition of the middle and upper classes, reflect differences in 'merit'.

We should be cautious about dismissing the rejection of reservations in favour of merit as a pollution-based statement about the unworthiness of lower castes or as a sign of indifference to poverty (Frøystad 2010; Shah 1996). Criticism of reservations may nevertheless be symptomatic of a new form of caste discrimination. Kathinka Frøystad (2010) argues that the perception among upper caste Hindus that their educational and occupational prospects have been curtailed by reservations has led to an increased reliance among these 'forward' castes on personal contacts in education, employment and other areas of life. This in turn has led to a strengthening of loyalties within the forward category and a severing of loyalties between reservation beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries as forward caste members work together to overcome the 'disadvantage' of reservations and avoid extending assistance to those they perceive to be already unfairly advantaged. I do not know whether such a process is at work in middle-class Hyderabad, but it seems probable that the perception of reservations as unfair contributes to the legitimizing of the use of caste loyalties in education and employment described below.

Employment

Most participants told me that employers did not show any preference for employees from their own caste. I was frequently told that one would not even know another person's caste in many working environments, particularly in the IT industry. The father of a St Catherine's student told me that 'the culture' is changing because of 'software' – now companies are giving importance to merit instead of caste. Parents, he said, have observed that 'corporate' companies are only hiring merit students and are now trying to provide a good education for their children without concern for its expense. The casteless-ness of software and other 'corporate' work environments was often contrasted with government employment where reservations made caste central, small businesses where the owners may prefer to work with people from their own 'community', and the awarding of contracts which was said to be rife with caste favouritism.

However, others believed caste was a consideration in all forms of employment. For example, several people told me that Reddy Laboratories (a large pharmaceutical company with several offices in Hyderabad) prefers to hire Reddys: "When giving jobs people in higher positions will prefer to give jobs to the same caste people. Not in all professions, but in some like local businesses and in pharma companies like Reddy's Labs. There most employees belong to Reddys, but this is reduced now. Now they are giving importance to talent because the person should be able to do the work"* (Middle middle-class Kamma female Riversdale teacher). The chairman of an upper middle-class school told

me that people prefer to do business with people of the same caste as they will have a 'like-mindedness'. The five directors of the company that owns his school are of the same caste. A Brahmin Riversdale father and director of a small software company, told me that 60 per cent of employees are Brahmins and Rajus and the remaining 40 per cent are non-Telugus of unknown caste. He explained that in positions where 'performance and output' were important, they did not look at caste, but when hiring for positions less integral to profit-making there was a preference for employees of the same caste as the directors – Brahmins and Rajus. He had no problem with this system claiming it does not harm anyone, but criticized Reddys and Chowdurys (Kammas) for showing caste-favouritism when awarding contracts for work.

Others suggested that caste-favouritism in the work environment was not a matter of hiring strategies but was evident in promotions and group formation within the business. A young male software worker told me "Businesses have to compete so a person who knows you are talented is going to use you, but people usually have a soft spot for others from the same caste."* A St Catherine's father told me that at his company people formed groups according to caste. He said these were not exactly friendship groups – caste was not a consideration when making friends – but when a new person started at the company people would comment on whose caste he belonged to and when two people of the same caste talked to each other onlookers would be conscious of the fact that they were of the same caste. An upper-middle class Brahmin young professional described similar nebulous forms of caste solidarity in her workplace:

When I go to the manufacturing facility, there is such a range of people from the guy who turns on the reactor through to the president and vice-president. They all have different backgrounds and different wealth. Their earnings range from daily wages through to 3 to 4 *crores* [40 million] per year. The shop floor guys will always ask you what caste you're from. It's their way of identifying with others. If they find out that they are the same caste as someone in a much higher position than them it is a way for them to feel comfortable with that person and to think that they or their children might one day also reach such a position.*

Participants' discussions of caste in the workplace indicate a range of effects including a substantialist sense of caste as a source of commonality, caste favouritism in hiring practices and a rejection of caste in favour of merit. Practices described by informants of giving jobs or contracts to those of the same caste are reminiscent of processes described by Carol Upadhyia (1988, 1997) in relation to farmer-capitalists in coastal Andhra Pradesh (see Chapter 1). As in Upadhyia's research, the middle-class Hyderabadis I spoke to suggested that Kammas, Reddys and other high castes are able to draw on their caste as a form of social capital in the employment and business world. While people may not consciously discriminate against other lower castes, having caste in common with potential employers, business partners or colleagues can be beneficial. Substantialist caste solidarity was not seen as problematic except when it was perceived to be an impediment to the profitability of the business. It was not acknowledged that such practices may serve to exclude members of lower castes who are far less likely to know people in such useful positions.

In contrast to this discourse of caste as a somewhat legitimate source of social capital is a discourse of merit that denies the relevance of caste. Employment in the IT industry is often represented as based entirely on merit rather than on social connections or ascriptive status as in public sector and ‘old economy’ companies. Discourses of merit and individual achievement ignore the social and economic factors that produce meritorious candidates which are reflected in the fact that most IT workers come from urban, middle-class, and high- or middle-caste families. In particular they ignore the fact that the social and cultural attributes thought to be necessary to work in the ‘global’ environment of IT – particularly fluency in English and ability to mingle – are part of the social and cultural capital of the middle class – which is composed mainly of upper castes. While the IT industry does not appear to deliberately practice caste discrimination in recruitment, the worker profile required makes it difficult for people from lower caste-class backgrounds to enter (Upadhyaya 2007: 88-90; 2011; Radhakrishnan 2011a). As Leela Fernandes (2011: 73) argues, “caste privilege provides socio-cultural resources that make up the social and cultural capital that middle-class individuals need to negotiate new economy jobs”. Thus, both semi-legitimate caste favouritism and highly legitimate ‘merit’ serve to exclude lower castes.

Friendship

Most people told me that they, their colleagues, their classmates (present or former), and other acquaintances did not show any preference for people of the same caste when forming friendships. A ‘BC’ (OBC) male Riversdale teacher, told me

People don’t avoid friendship with BC people or not give respect to them. In my generation it does not happen, but in my father’s generation it did. My brother got a government job and got some money. Then we got respect. Now good-caste people like Brahmins and Reddys they are all coming to my house and eating rice in the same place from the same plate. All other caste friends I have.*

Everyone claimed to have friends from many different castes and to share food with these friends.

However, a few people gave examples of others who did show a preference for same-caste friends. A couple of college students said they knew of someone whose friends on social networking sites were overwhelmingly of a single caste. A female young professional told me that some people at college, particularly Reddys and Naidus, had preferred the same caste friends but she saw this as part of a general trend of people preferring to hang out with their own kind whether that was based on language, money, state or dressing style. In all cases individuals who preferred friends from the same caste were described as exceptional.

*

There were other areas of social life in which caste discrimination was said to exist. People talked about ‘caste meetings’, large gatherings organized a few times a year by a caste organization (only one person admitted to attending these); a couple of interviewees mentioned people preferring to rent

rooms or apartments to people of their own caste; two female Riversdale students told me that people would be happy if the same caste lived next door to them;⁹ and someone told me that people will make a special effort to see a movie if the ‘hero’ is from their caste. Colleges were frequently mentioned in discussions of caste. Several people told me that if a college was run by people of a particular caste, students of that caste were more likely to enrol there and may be charged lower fees while students from other castes would be discouraged from applying. I heard rumours that in college people would give better marks to students from their caste. Navya, the elder sister of a Riversdale student, told me that her college was run by Rajus and some of the lecturers had a ‘soft spot’ for Raju students – giving them better explanations and marks, and making project work easier for them. This may represent an extension of the attempts to promote caste upward mobility through establishment and support of educational institutions (especially engineering colleges) described by Upadhyaya (1997: 175) in relation to rich Kamma farmers in coastal Andhra Pradesh.

Two central themes emerge from participants’ accounts of where caste matters. The most salient is undoubtedly ambivalence. Participants were not in agreement with each other and many seemed unsure about the areas of life in which caste matters. They also seemed uncertain about whether it is socially acceptable to prefer to work and/or socialize with one’s caste-mates, whether helping ‘your own kind’ should be positively or negatively evaluated. This provides support for the notion that caste as a hierarchy of purity-pollution has been delegitimized but caste as substantialized cultural ‘communities’ is to some extent socially acceptable. It is this substantialized caste that operates as a source of social capital which enables those castes with already greater access to resources to reproduce this position of dominance.

Even substantialist values are being questioned, however. Vamsi, a junior college student and son of Yashoda, seemed particularly proud of his caste identity. His USB data stick is named ‘Kshatriyas’ and he has scrawled ‘Kshatriyaaaaazzz’ in graffiti style script on the inside of a wardrobe door. But Vamsi talked negatively of people who take caste into consideration when choosing their friends and was embarrassed when his sister, Swetha, threatened to show his wardrobe graffiti to his friends. Such ambivalence was also evident when Swetha complained to me that her uncle had scolded her for the way she was eating her *rasam* (tamarind and tomato soup) and rice. Instead of eating a mixture of only *rasam* and rice at the end of the meal, Swetha was mixing other curries in with her *rasam* and rice. Swetha’s uncle told her that only labourers and Sudras, and not members of her caste, eat like that. He said if they were eating in a public place everyone would laugh at her eating in that way. It is difficult to know whether Swetha’s dislike for her uncle’s comments stems from a belief that caste does not determine behaviours that can be judged as more or less desirable, or from her perception that his concern with caste is inappropriate in an urban middle-class context.

Swetha told me that when talking with her friends the subject of caste sometimes comes up in relation to politics or movies. For example, Swetha mentioned that an actor is a member of her

⁹ Säävälä (2010: 186) found in Hyderabad that “Middle-class landlords want to preserve the image of their neighbourhood by barring entrance to people whose habitus hints at a low-caste background”.

family which led to a discussion of which actors belonged to each person's caste/family. It seemed that caste could be seen as an extension of the family, a form of relatedness that resulted in feelings of solidarity, but something that, the younger generation felt should not be used as a basis for making generalizations about behaviour and value judgements. For many of the younger generation, then, caste appears to be something of a 'symbolic ethnicity' (Gans 1979) important only as a source of personal and familial identity and not as a determinant of life chances or lifestyle.

A second theme is the superior legitimacy of merit over any form of caste favouritism – reservations or personal favours. Presented as established middle-class common sense, this ideology of merit denies the role of caste (and class) advantage in producing meritorious candidates. It allows for legitimized discrimination toward lower castes on the basis of their failure to meet middle-class standards of merit. Despite this discourse of merit, participants' accounts suggest that low caste status continues to be a disadvantage in many of the 'fields' in which class 'games' play out. Members of low castes appear to have neither the volume nor the right form or combination of 'capital' to succeed. I turn now to a consideration of local understandings of low status and practices of subordination and domination in an attempt to establish whether the basis of this lack of capital lies in class or caste structures.

Caste-Class Fusion

Informants often grouped people, particularly when speaking Telugu, into two categories – *peddavalu* (big people) and *chinnavalu* (small people). Acquaintances could be grouped into one or other of these categories based on their level of education, money and especially occupation. 'Small' people were also referred to as low class, poor, Below Poverty Line (always using the acronym BPL), uneducated, illiterate or, occasionally, 'third class employees'. Without knowing a person's income, occupation or education levels, informants categorized him or her as poor or BPL according to an unspoken list of criteria similar to those identified by Frøystad (2005) in Kanpur: dark weathered skin, small stature, poorly maintained ill-fitting and unfashionable clothes, overly expressive body language, and loud 'crude' speech revealing rural origins and a low education level. Such people were believed to be lazy and aggressive and to have 'bad habits' such as drinking and smoking. Middle-class informants avoided contact with such people whenever possible (see Chapter 3 for more details).

Although my participants generally spoke in class terms when talking about 'small' people and the characteristics associated with them, similar characteristics were occasionally attributed to people of low-caste status as when a male Riversdale student told me that some parents warn children about spending time with backward castes out of concern that their children will learn bad words and bad behaviour. Furthermore, in other research settings in which informants have spoken more explicitly about caste, an almost identical list of characteristics to that provided above is associated with those of low-caste status (Still Forthcoming-b). It is this overlap of meaning that leads Frøystad to describe

the boundaries between caste and class as 'blended'. She asserts that in Kanpur the upper-caste middle-class distinction between 'good people' and 'small people' is entirely different from caste, but is influenced by caste models. This was evident in the strong expectation among her informants that 'good people' were of upper caste background and 'small people' were of low-caste or Dalit background, and the tendency of 'good' upper castes to maintain distance from 'small people'.

The strong overlap of meanings attached to class and caste terms was evident on occasions when my informants' used class and caste terms interchangeably. During a debate in a St Catherine's tenth class, one group of students argued that if women worked they would be able to raise their families from lower caste to higher caste. What they meant is that the family's wealth would increase, but they saw wealth as a sign of caste rather than class status. When asked to clarify whether they meant class or caste in an interview, a group of university students joked that the two were too difficult to distinguish, laughing and saying 'caste, class, caste, class...'. When asked about differences between *classes*, a St Catherine's mother switched between talking about lower-*class* language and lower-*caste* language: "Lower class means while speaking they'll use very bad language. SC caste the vocabulary that they use is not a decent language. They use a kind of a slang language which is not very acceptable. We used to feel very shy while hearing those words."* People did recognize a difference between caste and class, but the frequent slippage between the two suggested that they were not clearly distinguishable and that there was very close association between high class and high caste and between low class and low caste people, characteristics and cultures. This association works both ways, such that low caste people are assumed to be poor and poor people are assumed to be low caste: "If you are below Vaishyas people will assume you're poor" (Upper-middle class female young professional, Brahmin).

The explanation Jaya Krishna, a Riversdale father who identified as 'OC' (other or forward caste), gave for the bad behaviour of young men on the street reveals some of the nuances of caste-class conflation. After my interview with Jaya Krishna had officially finished I switched off my laptop (on which I had been taking notes) and we chatted about my experiences in Hyderabad. I had recently discovered that mentioning that men 'passed comments' when I walked past (see Chapter 7), often led to interesting conversations and so recounted how, on my way to the interview, some men had yelled 'wow!' in exaggerated American accents in my direction. Jaya Krishna assured me that this was not representative of Indian society more generally. He said these were probably 'punk' boys with spiky hair who look 'posh', but were probably from quite poor uneducated families. He said I would not even be able to sit in their houses because the poverty of their surroundings would make me uncomfortable. Jaya Krishna talked about how such families would struggle to feed their children as if this represented a moral failing. Despite their families' poverty, these young men had been educated to intermediate level and now thought they were 'very high'. He said that these young 'punks' had no appreciation for how much their parents had struggled to educate them and certainly did not care about the society or country. In Jaya Krishna's opinion, this was particularly a problem

with some castes. He said SCs and certain BCs were particularly bad, but STs were not so bad. He described these as 'dangerous' castes.¹⁰

Another possibility, according to this Riversdale father, was that these young men were from families who had taken advantage of the property boom in Hyderabad and had suddenly become very wealthy by selling their land on the outskirts of the city. Their children did not know what to do with all the money and spent it on expensive bikes and other useless things. They would wake up at 2pm, leave the house around 3pm and stay out until 3am looking for ways to spend their money. Then in about 5 years' time all the money would be gone. He said that most of these former land-owning new rich in his area are Varmas (a Raju (Kshatriya) surname) who behave like drunk monkeys.

These examples illustrate that, at the level of discourse, caste and class are inseparable. I am not simply suggesting here that the language of class is being used to talk about the deeper, more meaningful categories of caste or vice versa. It is not merely a case of one acting as a 'code' for the other, as Deshpande (2003: 146) suggests when he observes that upper-caste status has been so strong a criterion for middle-class membership that "in everyday language, the term 'middle class' often functions as a code word for 'upper caste'". Rather, I argue that the meaningful content of the two terms is intricately fused. This is also evident in Caroline and Filippo Osella's (2000) ethnographic account of low-caste Izhavas. According to the Osellas, despite Izhavas' efforts to reform caste practices and their significant successes in class mobility, qualities associated with Izhavas remain overwhelmingly negative, in contrast to Nayar and Christian 'communities' which are "envisaged as unequivocally middle class and in possession of both wealth and prestige" (Osella & Osella 2000: 244). 'Middle-class' in the Osella's Keralan fieldsite is inseparable from 'Nayar' and 'Christian' and vice versa; the meanings of each inform the other. We see this also in middle-class informants' use of the word 'dirty'.

Frøystad gives an example from Kanpur of a woman scolding her young child for trying to climb onto the back of a servant, Seema, who is washing the floor. The mother describes Seema as *gandagī* (dirty). Frøystad reflects, "Whether Seema's *gandagī* referred to her caste background, to her floor-cleaning profession, or to her current contact with the physical dirt on the floor is impossible to say, and perhaps even futile to ponder." She argues that the point "is precisely the multiple meanings of *gandagī* and the inference of each meaning upon the others". As in Frøystad's example, the word 'dirty' appeared to be a potent one for my informants and was used in a variety of contexts in which issues of class, caste and cleanliness were ambiguously invoked. I spent several days over the 2009

¹⁰ See Anandhi et al. (2002) for a discussion of a new Dalit masculinity that involves display of well-built fashionably dressed bodies, roaming the streets, display of violence and harassing of women. Caroline and Filippo Osella (2000: 121) have similarly observed that in Kerala "Being extremely fashionable in widely associated in the mainstream with low-life and with *Harijan style*". This violent and fashion-oriented style of masculinity appears to be popular among men of non-Dalit castes as well and is portrayed as a distinct style of 'college cool' in Telugu and Bollywood films. Whether this aggressive masculinity was indeed initially Dalit and has spread up the caste-class hierarchy would be an interesting line of investigation. It could also be argued that aggressiveness is also part of a Kshatriya style of masculinity as this Riversdale father goes on to suggest. The construction of the street as a low caste-class male space will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Dassera holiday in the ancestral village or ‘native place’ of Yashoda’s family. We were driving to a temple when we passed a group of villagers walking in procession, singing and dancing. I asked if I could get out and take some photos (the road was narrow so we had to stop and wait for them to pass), but was told the road was dirty. During our stay in the village I asked if I could go and explore. Again I was told that the road was too dirty. Swetha explained this dirt in terms of hygiene – ‘village people’ do not have toilets and use the side of the road instead – but I got the distinct impression that the road was also more symbolically a place of dirt and pollution, a space where respectable, upper caste-class girls should not be seen. Similar ambiguity lay in the somewhat teasing use of the rebuke ‘dirty fellow!’ for children or status equals (friends, siblings) engaged in unclean or generally naughty or irritating behaviour.

At the level of practice, caste and class appeared similarly intertwined. A sense of upper-caste pride was detectable when Brahmin teachers explained to me that they were ‘pure-veg’ and caste prejudice may have been behind a Brahmin St Catherine’s teacher’s open dislike for a ‘BC’ teacher and her failure to refer to him as ‘sir.’ In most instances, however, dominating or subordinate behaviour could not be so clearly attributed to caste. For example, my observations of the relationship between Yashoda’s middle middle-class Kshatriya family and their servants led me to question whether caste and class were indistinguishable both in the minds of participants and in their observable effects. The cleaner always left her shoes half way up the stairs to the house instead of at the entrance to the house with all the other shoes and was never left in the house alone. A driver was fired ostensibly for being a bad driver, but later there were comments about him being too familiar, not knowing his place. The next driver sat on a stool by the door instead of on the couch. Yashoda’s daughter, Swetha, said that because he was from their village he knew how to behave around her family. It seemed to be the case that this driver was preferable because, coming from the same village, he knew his caste position in relation to theirs and was able to silently recognise his place and the unspoken rules of caste-class behaviour. Although the respect and subordination desired could easily be interpreted in class terms, the importance attached to knowing ones ‘place’ in village hierarchies indicates belonging to a much more rigid system.

Similar ambiguity in relation to servants has been observed by Sara Dickey in Baroda. She (2000: 476) argues that members of the middle and upper classes are particularly concerned about servants who represent the dirt, disease and rusticity of a disorderly lower-class outside world and threaten to bring these elements in to the cleanliness, order and hygiene of employers’ homes. Employers seek to strictly control the presence of servants in their homes in order to limit the inflow of lower class-caste ‘pollution’ and the outflow of stolen goods and gossip. Although these practices of avoidance, explained through discourses of public health and hygiene, could emerge from the low-class status of servants, they may also, as Dickey (2000: 475) argues, “be rationalized forms of pollution concerns.” Indeed, all matters of middle-class Hyderabadis’ avoidance of the poor or ‘small’ people could be read as inflected with pollution concerns, as when an upper middle-class young

professional woman told me, “I’ve always detested travelling by bus. You get many not so refined people travelling by bus. I’m not comfortable. People who board buses are not the best sort of people.” Such avoidances may not take caste as their primary reference point, but in practice do not appear that dissimilar from caste-derived concerns about pollution.

Another sphere in which the symbols of caste and class overlap significantly is in relation to ‘culture’. Middle-class culture is not caste-neutral. At Riversdale all teachers brought vegetarian food to school for lunch and shared it with each other. The sharing of food and discussions of how it had been prepared were central to forming bonds of friendship. For these teachers, as for the groups of young male friends studied by Nisbett (2007: 941) in Bangalore and Jeffrey (2010: 94) in Meerut, such sharing expressed a “rejection of exterior societal norms of hierarchy and ideas surrounding polluting substances passed through the sharing of food”.¹¹ However, the fact that the food was predominantly vegetarian suggests that in the staff room upper-caste culture is assumed to be the norm. In the same way that the Dalit Students’ Union at Hyderabad Central University were told that a beef stall would cause offence to those who view meat- (and particularly beef) eating as unnecessary and immoral (Gundimeda 2009: 129-30), we can imagine that in the staff room vegetarian food is preferred because it is deemed to be less problematic. Although some teachers did occasionally bring non-vegetarian food and did not appear to face any consequences for doing so, it is instructive that meat-eaters regularly complied with upper caste vegetarianism without reflecting on this as an issue of caste.

It may seem an unjustifiably large leap from this expectation of vegetarianism to the assertion that middle-class culture is upper-caste until one considers recent efforts by Dalit activists to assert Dalit practices such as meat and beef eating, consumption of alcohol and speaking in lower-caste dialects in the public sphere (Pandian 2002). The failure of such efforts to achieve legitimacy for such practices makes it clear that lower-caste success in class mobility requires assimilation to upper-caste cultural norms in order for one’s culture to ‘pass’ as middle-class. The notion of marked and unmarked ethnicity can be applied to this situation. In multi-ethnic societies such as the United States, the dominant group are generally not recognised as ‘ethnic’; their way of life is considered normal and goes ‘unmarked’. ‘Ethnicity’ is seen as the property of immigrant and minority ethnic communities as evidenced by phenomena such as ‘ethnic’ food festivals. In middle-class Hyderabad, where concern for caste has become a sign of ‘backwardness’, successful performance of middle-class culture requires the performance of ‘unmarked’ upper-caste culture.

The arena in which caste and class are perhaps most inseparable is in their embodiment, as the case of my research assistant, Nikhil, illustrates. Nikhil is highly educated and has lived in Hyderabad for many years, but I and my informants were easily able to identify that he does not quite ‘fit’ in the suburban middle-class world I was observing. Nikhil comes from a very poor Scheduled Caste family who live in rural Andhra Pradesh. Although he does not have the dark complexion commonly

¹¹ Unlike Nisbett’s participants, the teachers did show hesitation in relation to the polluting contact of saliva. Teachers were careful not to share cutlery or to touch their lips to shared drinking vessels.

associated with those of low caste-class status, his background can be read in his small stature (village thin rather than fashion slim), his cheap worn sandals, his loose formal trousers, his faded ill-fitting shirt and his oiled hair. Most communicative of his low caste-class status, however, is his nervousness. Nikhil was very reluctant to schedule interviews with informants over the phone, worried that his Telugu might be thought ‘impolite.’ When meeting informants in their homes to conduct interviews he showed extreme deference. On all occasions in which we ate together he had to be asked several times to join me at the table in the house where I was staying and explained later that he was worried that I might be using cutlery with which he is unfamiliar or might be offended by his manner of serving and eating his food. He said he was often afraid when interacting with upper-class people that he would be misunderstood. He is occasionally invited to restaurants by ‘posh’ friends but usually declines as he does not know how to use cutlery and “by seeing the richness I feel little bit uncomfortable.” On one occasion when he did accept such an invitation, assuming that everything on his plate was edible, he put what looked like a flower into his mouth. When he realized it was made of plastic or paper or something equally inedible, he decided to swallow the decorative piece anyway rather than have his mistake discovered. It is the enduring nature of this habitus of fear, this sense of not quite knowing the rules of the game, that ensures that Nikhil’s success in one field – education – does not translate into an ability to cultivate distinction in other spheres.¹²

This habitus appears to be a product of both economic and caste subordination. Nikhil asserted that class is more significant. He said, “In the city money matters” and explained that if he and a Brahmin went to the same school and each had a car they would meet at school and talk – their shared wealth would overcome any difference in caste (see Nisbett 2007). However, Nikhil was cautious about revealing his caste to people. Although his friends know his caste, when he visits their homes he often avoids identifying his caste, deliberately misleads people or occasionally lies outright. He said parents of friends are sometimes uncomfortable having a person of his caste in their homes and eating with him. He does not attend *pujas* at the homes of upper caste friends as he knows this would lead to trouble if his caste was discovered. Accordingly, I argue that subordination such as Nikhil’s cannot be clearly demarcated into caste and class elements, particularly at the level of habitus.

To assert that class and caste are inseparable at the level of discourse and practice is in many ways an unsatisfactory answer to the question of whether poverty or low caste status is more central to subordination in contemporary urban India. A more comprehensive answer to this question would require attention to the status of those with low-caste middle-class status or high-caste low-class status. Does a poor Brahmin give respect to a rich Dalit? Is a rich Dalit able to ‘pass’ in middle-class society? Caroline and Filippo Osella’s (2000) work with upwardly mobile Izhavas sheds some light on

¹² Gorringer and Rafanell (2007) argue that because habitus is internalized at an early age and subsequently unchanging, it cannot explain the reflexive agency required for calculated shifts in the performance of caste in private and public spheres of urban life. However, for Bourdieu, habitus entails both the embodiment of early socialization and the perpetual construction of positions of dominance and subordination through interaction. Furthermore, the fact that caste is enacted differently in public and private is entirely consistent with Bourdieu’s notion of ‘fields’ (see also Guru 2002: 5006).

this matter. They argue that caste acts as a strong barrier that threatens to undermine successes in class mobility. Upwardly mobile Izhavas are unable to 'shake off' their caste status despite efforts to assimilate in large part because caste is embodied as an enduring habitus which continues to be reproduced (2000: 231, 250-51). Säävälä (2010: 185) makes a similar point when she observes that even if lower caste members of Hyderabad's middle-classes "dress in neat and fashionable clothes and try to adopt a middle-class appearance their relatively dark skin and habitus – deferential or complex attitudes to people they expect to be of higher caste or a lack of erudition which shows in their manner of speaking – easily creates doubts about their caste background." It appears, then, that the inseparability of low caste status from meanings of subordination ensures that a deferential habitus endures even when middle-class status has been achieved.

Conclusion

In suburban middle-class Hyderabad the changing role of caste in social life is reflected in distinct generational differences in attitudes toward caste and nervousness about the degree of 'caste feeling' a respectable person can admit to. Informants' narratives suggest that caste as a hierarchy of purity and pollution has been delegitimized in public life, but participants continue to feel some sense of solidarity with their caste-mates. They express uncertainty as to the contexts in which it is acceptable to act on these feelings. As Margit van Wessel (2001: 100) observed of Baroda's middle classes,

Statements of liberalism with regard to caste endogamy may confer some status on the speaker when uttered in liberal company. Application of the same liberalism in one's personal life, however, may bring with it the denouncement of members of the family and caste community for whom caste endogamy is not outmoded orthodoxy, but proper community loyalty and morality.

Although caste appears to have become substantialized or ethnified, hierarchy is evident in the sense that not all castes are equally different and examples of particular significance attached to the boundary between SC/ST and other castes. This may provide some support for arguments that chances for upward mobility and acceptance within the middle classes differ markedly between low 'clean' castes and Dalits. Both Parry (2007) and Ishii (2007) suggest that although boundaries between the Hindu castes have become increasingly permeable, the sharp divide between these castes and Dalits persists (see also Mosse 1999: 90; Jodhka 2008).

The suburban middle-class Hyderabadis I studied, like the professional middle-class intelligentsia studied by Bétéille (1996), see caste origin as increasingly irrelevant in many areas of life and as unconnected with the means of livelihood. Education, occupation, and income are more frequently the basis of status distinctions than caste and merit is seen as the only truly legitimate selection criteria. However, participants' narratives along with other research illustrate that processes of class (re)production are inextricably shaped by caste. Although secular rather than religious signs

of status may be accorded most significance in middle-class Hyderabad, the strong correlation between caste and class and the extent to which participants conflate the two ensure that lower castes rank poorly on both secular and religious hierarchies.

Like Caroline and Filippo Osella (2000: 11), I have found the work of Pierre Bourdieu provides “a way out of the sterile impasse of debates about whether the real issue is caste or class”. Bourdieu’s concept of class as comprised of different capitals – economic, social, cultural and symbolic – that can be exchanged and converted provides a framework for thinking about the processes by which caste advantage is converted into class advantage. Caste feeds into wider hierarchies of capital so that the strategies that individuals and families employ in order to achieve and maintain middle class status continue to be shaped, if not determined, by caste membership (Fernandes 2006: 106). It is not just that low caste correlates with a lack of economic resources. Caste can also be a resource in itself. As Carol Upadhyia argues, “caste can be understood as a flexible source of social capital which is employed in various ways in different contexts” (1997: 191). Upadhyia has shown that investing in caste solidarity can further class interests for dominant castes as they can draw on caste networks when seeking business contacts or employment.

Scholarly accounts of contemporary India indicate that although the stranglehold of the upper castes on all middle-class jobs has been recently loosened (Deshpande 2003: 146), a person’s entry into the middle classes continues to be facilitated by the political and economic resources of their caste (Upadhyia 1988; Upadhyia 1997; Sheth 1999). Lower castes are disproportionately represented among the lower classes and thus disproportionately disadvantaged by the lack of social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital necessary for social mobility. This leads Bêteille (2003: 81) to assert that the “Indian middle class is unique not so much because of any peculiarity of the Indian occupational or educational system as because of the peculiar way in which class is intertwined with caste and community in contemporary Indian society.”

With such reliance on interviews, the main contribution of this chapter does not lie in an accurate picture of the reality of caste discrimination. Instead I have focused on the deep mutual implication of caste and class in informants’ narratives. Class and caste do not simply ‘interact’ as separate, if reinforcing, systems of categorization as the discussion of capitals above suggests. I argue that low-caste status is conflated with low-class status to such an extent that, to be low caste is, as Ortner (2006: 77) has said of African American race/ethnicity, “to be seen to be or felt to be, in essence – and whether one is in reality or not – lower class” and vice versa. This is not just about language, however. This is a “semantic and ideological organization of a field of cultural categories about social difference” (Ortner 2006: 74) that forms the basis of real social practice as we see in the ambiguity of practices of avoidance and in demands for respect. Attention to the inseparability of the meanings of caste and class suggests that the question should not be ‘where does caste matter?’, but rather ‘in which fields is the caste dimension of class-caste status most salient?’. Thus, in the field of

marriage, the rules of the game may be articulated in terms of caste, but these rules assume a class compatibility.

People of low caste have two options when striving for class mobility. They can attempt to adopt middle-class culture in its current upper-caste form. As we saw in the example of staff room vegetarianism and as has been described by several other scholars, 'normal,' 'Indian' or 'middle-class' culture is defined in terms of upper-caste culture to the exclusion of lower-caste gender relations (Still Forthcoming-a) and practices such as meat and beef eating, consumption of alcohol and speaking in lower caste dialects (Pandian 2002). In attempting to 'pass' by adopting middle-class/upper-caste culture, low castes are likely to fail because, as Bourdieu (1984) reminds us, it is not just the content of cultural capital that is important but also the means of acquisition. Attempts to 'pass' are undone by the failure to perform as natural what one has acquired didactically rather than through long-term upper-caste socialization, and by an enduring habitus of subordination.

An alternative for those of lower-caste status is to empty middle-classness of its upper-caste connotations by seeking legitimacy for lower caste practices in the public sphere. This too seems unlikely to succeed because a lack of caste or caste denial is an important sign of middle-classness, thus requiring the performance of 'unmarked' upper-caste culture read as casteless, rather than lower caste culture which is 'marked' as caste.¹³ Therefore, in displaying signs of their caste identity, members of lower castes identify themselves as non-middle class.

Informants' comments about the insignificance of caste are part of presenting themselves as progressive and secular and thus as middle-class/upper-caste. This is evident in the work of other scholars. Ritty Lukose (2010), for example, suggests that a modern, enlightened secular outlook is often part and parcel of people's upper caste identity. She describes this as "an ambiguous caste erasure, one that marks without naming" (2010: 217). Pandian makes a similar argument when he describes upper-caste practices of talking about caste 'by other means' in contrast to lower caste practice of talking about caste 'in its own terms'. He argues that "caste, as the other of the modern, always belongs to the lower castes" (2002: 1738).

The construction of castelessness as a part of a progressive secular middle-class identity, ensures that 'respectable', 'clean' caste status becomes a taken-for-granted aspect of middle-class identity. As denial and criticism of 'caste feelings' becomes central to claims to progressive open-mindedness, low castes signal their 'backwardness' when they talk of the burden of caste in their lives. Attempts to assert lower caste culture in middle-class public spheres is likely to be read not as the assertion of one caste culture against another, but as the assertion of caste against a secular, and thus more legitimately middle-class, culture. In a somewhat paradoxical reversal of the *savarna-avarna* distinction, the central caste divide in middle-class Hyderabad becomes that between those with caste and those without.

¹³ See Fernandes (2006: 67) for additional comments on the significance of an 'unmarked' upper-caste identity to middle-class identity.

In this chapter it has been clear that caste is indeed hidden or submerged in middle-class Hyderabad. Caste is spoken, more often than not, in the language of class. In the following chapters it will be evident that class(-caste) is not directly spoken in middle-class Hyderabad, appearing instead in the language of morality (Chapter 3), knowledge and education (Chapter 4) and gendered notions of respectability (Chapters 5-7).

3

Constructing Middle-Class Respectability

One thing I can say is middle class people will be standard. Their income will be standard and their lifestyle will be standard. They don't go for higher things. They go for Rs 500 skirt not Rs 1000 or Rs 1200 and lower-class people don't even think to buy. Their lifestyle is not like privileged; very normal ... The thing is we should be very much decent and respectable. When we are in society we should behave properly* (Lower middle-class female college student).¹⁴

Middle class suffers. They can't go to lower class. They can't go to upper class ... We don't know whether we have to study in lower school or upper school. If we want to go to upper school there is no money. If we go to lower school, what will people think?* (Middle middle-class Riversdale mother).

The comments of these informants reveal a construction of the middle classes as 'standard' or 'normal,' as 'decent' and 'respectable' and as caught between the high and the low in such a way that they are required always to worry about the appropriateness of their lifestyles and practices and their capacity (especially economic) to enact them. Like Mark Liechty's (2003: 67) middle-class informants in Kathmandu, these informants speak of "a notion of *middleness*, of occupying a position *between* social others". Unlike the poor and elite, whose lifestyles are seen as more clearly defined, members of the middle classes present themselves as dealing with a wide range of reference points in negotiating a way of life that will be acceptable to their peers. Such themes emerged repeatedly in participants' narratives and appeared to form the foundation of understandings of the middle classes and their moralized norms of propriety.

In this chapter I explore local understandings of what it means to be middle class by examining attitudes toward the poor and the elite. This reveals a strong sense of middle-class moral superiority that is rooted in notions of decency, propriety and reserve as well as in ideas about Indianness. I describe tensions between rejection and emulation in relation to the elite that reflect two routes to status – wealth and power, and respectability and decency. Such tensions emerge again in attitudes toward consumption where conflict is evident not only between a desire to emulate elite consumption patterns and middle-class moral censorship that calls for restraint, but also between an idealized model of middle-class morality and a perceived reality of middle-class consumerist moral corruption. I conclude by considering the relationship between class and space both in terms of the use of spatial metaphors to understand degrees of backwardness or progressiveness and in terms of the division of the city into separate class-caste spaces. I argue that elite class status is simultaneously about extending the boundaries of exposure and about the ability to construct boundaries between oneself and undesirable others by privatizing one's use of public space.

¹⁴ The word 'standard' generally has more positive connotations in Indian English than it does in British English.

The Poor: Moral and Physical Distancing

Hyderabad's middle classes employed a range of categories and criteria when assessing "whom they should behave respectfully towards, whom they could ignore and whom they should maintain a distance from" (Frøystad 2005: 25). In the previous chapter I detailed the terms – poor, Below Poverty Line (always using the acronym BPL), uneducated, illiterate – and the characteristics – dark skin, small stature, poorly maintained ill-fitting and unfashionable clothes, overly expressive body language, and loud 'crude' speech – associated with 'small' people, i.e., those of low class-caste status. Here I will expand on these characteristics to illustrate how they form the basis for moral and physical distancing from those of low caste-class status.

In Hyderabad, class stereotypes were particularly salient in college and university contexts where students are more likely than at school to interact with people from very different class backgrounds. The poorest students were referred to by many participants as the 'mass' (pronounced with a long 'a') gang. The word '*errabus*', meaning red bus, i.e. the buses used in villages, was frequently used to describe the mass generally or to tease non-mass friends who had dressed or were behaving in a rural manner. A young female Riversdale teacher explained that the word would be used: "if they are not well groomed or if their communication skills and dressing are not good. It is just teasing. It means they are lagging behind."* An upper middle-class college student told me that '*errabus*' is associated with rude village language, pinning the *dupatta/chuni* (shawl/scarf) to the *kurta* (long loose shirt), oiling one's hair or tying it very tightly, and wearing a large *bindi* (a dot of colour or a sticker applied between the eyebrows of Hindu women).

These superficial differences between the poor and the middle-class were understood to be indicative of a culture or lifestyle and 'mentality' or 'mindset' at odds with middle-class notions of decency and respectability. Participants were very critical of the lifestyles of the deprived. They talked about the dirt, their rough and impolite language and their propensity toward domestic violence and other uncontrolled outbursts of anger. Due to their more pressing material concerns, participants explained, the poor have no concern for the opinions of others and are free to express themselves and do as they please.

In my hostel when I was studying homeopathy, there were people staying in small tents. One man would drink and come and beat the wife daily. Why he is beating like this? Is it necessary? She is crying and crying. That is happening in lower class only* (Middle middle-class Riversdale mother).

Lower class are rough and tough [points in the direction of the slum area]. Even in my shop if someone comes and there is a small mistake in money they want to start a fight^I (Lower middle-class St Catherine's mother).

Informants were, in their attitudes toward the poor, similar to the middle classes in Baroda studied by van Wessel (2004: 105) who talked positively about "living alongside 'educated' and 'hardworking'

people like themselves who care about decency, rather than among ‘uneducated, lower class’ people in the inner city who are prone to fighting, drinking and loitering”.

Although most people acknowledged the difficulty of living in poverty and expressed pity for the plight of the poor, they tended to explain the undesirable traits described above not in terms of the structural causes of deprivation but in terms of personal failings. They described the poor as personally responsible for their plight. Some suggested that the poor do not work because they are lazy or lacking in initiative:

That kind of inquisitiveness to grow, inquisitiveness to mould themselves in a different way it is very less in lower class though they have potential and talent. So they never give a try to mould themselves. Whereas there is very much inclination within upper class people and entrepreneur-ness is there in the upper-class people and middle-class people. That is not there in lower-class people. So what they think is, ‘OK, how should I spend my day?’ That is the thinking of lower class people, whereas middle class people think ‘OK, how should I try to save for the next two, three months or six months?’ (Upper middle-class St Catherine’s father).

Others asserted that the poor live the way they do, not because of a lack of income, but because they spend their money on other things. A popular urban myth was that beggars are actually quite wealthy and live in poverty so that they can continue to attract the substantial income that begging provides. A St Catherine’s mother told me, “This family is earning Rs 30,000 but roadside people might also be earning Rs 30,000”^T. The most common way that the poor were constructed as culpable for their deprivation was through their failure to plan for the future:

If you want to hire someone for one day of work you will have to pay them Rs 300 to 500. But at the end of the day he never thinks that he has to save something. He never thinks about tomorrow or about his children’s future. He earned and he enjoyed; that’s all* (Middle middle-class Riversdale father).

The lower-class people they never think about tomorrow because what they get today they like to spend and enjoy and hence they don’t save. They worry about only today. And middle-class people they worry about tomorrow because they would like to save for their children. They don’t want their children to face the same problems what they are facing now. You know, the middle-class people are the people under pressure all the time, isn’t it? Sometimes they are curbed in society, you know. Sometimes they can’t do as they wish because they have large responsibilities and they go for future time. They plan for future time. They can’t spend the money as they wish, isn’t it? They think about their children and they think about tomorrow and they think about today. They also keep past in mind so these three ... They [poor people] don’t have money so they think for today not for tomorrow or past. ‘So if I work hard I will get money so today I got some money so let’s spend it. Let me eat and let me sleep’ (Upper middle-class Riversdale mother).

Informants recognized that the middle classes are to some extent characterized, as Jeffrey (2010: 33, 71) argues, by their ability to wait and to invest in long-term rewards, and framed this capacity in moral terms.

Negative moral associations of poverty were also evident in descriptions of the ‘mass’ group at college:

In the mass gang they always blame others for what they don't have. They always confine themselves; in case of enjoyment, in case of going around, even in case of education (Young male software worker).

Research Assistant: Is there such thing as a mass group?

Male college student: Yah [laughs] ... Lower-class people we call them. Not like lower-class people but some people who doesn't know how to behave with people and with girls and they do lot of bad things ... Like using bad words and foul language, and getting into fights without thinking ... not really lower-class people but guys like that.

Although this college student tries to assert that the 'mass' group is characterized by this bad behaviour and not by class, the association between the two is clear.

Middle-class people attempted to distance themselves from the poor and to assert their position in the middle classes by criticising the socioeconomic failings of the poor in moralized terms. In doing so they defined the middle classes not in terms of socio-economic advantage, but in terms of a more refined and decent culture achieved through hard work and 'future planning'. As well as discursively distancing themselves from the poor, middle-class people in Hyderabad avoided physical proximity and contact with those they perceived to be inferior to themselves. Kathinka Frøystad (2005: 123-4) describes three ways in which her middle-class informants in Kanpur minimized contact with 'small' people: by avoiding places where such people were likely to be present and where congestion made physical proximity unavoidable; by remaining in/on their vehicles; and by creating exclusive public spaces that 'small' people could not enter. All three of these processes were employed in Hyderabad as this young male software worker explained:

In my personal opinion there is no need to do anything to show others that I am a middle-class person, but I know the general opinion is that you shouldn't share autos or travel in a public bus if you want people to think you are middle-class. You also shouldn't buy things outside [on the street]. It is better to buy bad things in a big store than to buy good things outside.

Middle and upper middle-class people in Hyderabad avoided public transport and expressed great surprise at my use of 'share autos' (rickshaws than run a set route picking people up along the way) and cheap public buses. In her account of Hyderabad's middle classes, Minna Säävälä (2010: 118) similarly describes how informants avoided the physical proximity to the poor necessitated by public transport in large part because they did not want to be seen and associated with such people. Informants also expressed concerns about unavoidable physical proximity with the wrong kinds of people in relation to visits to the bustling markets of Charminar (in the Old City) and Secunderabad.

Avoidance of the poor can be seen in middle-class Hyderabad's distaste for walking. People drove everywhere. Parents on scooters, motorbikes and in cars dropped their children off at school bus stops a few hundred metres from their homes and motorbikes or scooters were used for even the shortest trips to the shops. I was reprimanded frequently for walking the excessively long distance (less than a mile) from the bus stop to St Catherine's. Walking appeared to hold two dangers. One,

others might think that the walker was doing so out of necessity; i.e. an inability to afford motorized transport. As Bourdieu has argued, the middle classes desire to demonstrate their status through practices (such as conspicuous leisure) that highlight their 'distance from necessity' (1984: 56). Thus, a middle-class person should walk only the shortest of distances and should do so in the slowest and most dignified manner possible so as to create the impression of leisure rather than labour (see Frøystad 2005: 109-11). Two, walking places a person in more direct contact with undesirable others on the street, whereas scooters, motorbikes and especially cars create distance and thus a more privatized movement through public space (Sheller & Urry 2000). Finally, the mushrooming of large and prohibitively expensive air-conditioned malls, department stores and cinema halls in Hyderabad has enabled the upper middle class and the elite to exclude the poor and the lower middle class from their public spaces.

In sum, upper-caste middle-class Hyderabadis express repugnance at the lifestyle of the poor, blame the poor for their fate and seek to avoid those of low class-caste status. Discursively and physically distancing themselves from the poor appeared central to positioning themselves as middle-class. A number of scholars have argued that the consumer-oriented Indian middle classes lack social concern. Varma, for example, suggests that economic liberalization has "deadened even further any remaining sense of concern in it [the Indian middle class] for the disadvantaged" (1998: 184). Säävälä supports this view in her assertion that "large sections of the newly wealthy and the newly upwardly mobile do not seem to feel the need to even pay lip service to their moral role as leaders in a struggle against poverty in India" (2010: 120). One should be cautious, however, about attributing conscious motive to these forms of prejudice.

I do not believe that derogatory statements made by informants about those of low caste-class status indicate that class-caste prejudice is positively valued nor should they be taken as evidence of the middle classes' indifference to poverty. Indeed the arguments of Varma and others do not align with my observation of Riversdale and all other upper middle-class schools I visited, which were actively involved in efforts to raise money and provide services for people living in poverty. Students and teachers at Riversdale raise money and provide teacher-training every year for a village school run by a Hyderabad-based charity. Riversdale students and teachers have visited the village school and have been visited by students and teachers from that school. One could cynically argue that these efforts were simply the product of their desire to get rid of or at least civilize the morally repugnant poor, to enhance their own economic position and national pride through the development of the country or to enhance their own status through social work. Certainly in Hyderabad social work was central to ideas about being a 'good citizen' and a source of pride and status for those who engaged in it. I do not, however, believe that my middle-class informants were entirely lacking in concern or compassion for the poor.

Qayam and Ray (2011: 270) note similar ambivalence in middle-class employers' attitudes toward their domestic servants (see also Banerjee 2006). Although these employers recognize that

servants should be considered persons with rights, they cannot reconcile this discourse of rights with their perception of servants as possessing a distinctive nature and their expectations rooted in a culture of servitude. I suggest that the ambivalent attitudes toward the poor expressed by my informants and Qayam and Ray's reflect a tension between notions of permeable persons and an embodied habitus of avoidance on the one hand, and democratic discourses of egalitarianism and rights on the other. The notion that poverty reflects personal inferiorities and the strong desire to avoid the poor should be understood within the context of a "cultural concern with the relationship between doing and being" (Busby 2000: 19) within which people are seen to be profoundly influenced by the qualities of the places and people with whom they interact (Daniel 1984; see also Bear 2007: 288). My informants represented the poor as profoundly affected by the environment and practices of poverty and avoided such environments, practices and people themselves so as not to be similarly permeated by poverty. Following Baviskar and Ray (2011: 6-7), I contend that the contradictions in middle-class attitudes toward the poor "are inherent in the middle class's claim of being an enlightened representative of public opinion while also needing to distinguish itself clearly from the lower orders". It is important to remember, however, that while middle-class avoidance of the poor may serve to reproduce their dominance, such avoidance is not necessarily guided by a conscious and deliberate search for the satisfaction of their interests. The power of a dominant habitus lies precisely in the fact that the dominant "have only to give way to their dispositions in order to produce practices that are 'naturally' distinguished; they can do so without having to take distinction as a goal, without pursuing it as such" (Bourdieu 1990a: 109).

The Elite: Moralized Rejection and Limited Emulation

The upper classes were generally referred to as rich, posh or hi-fi and, occasionally, elite (pronounced e-light). At colleges and universities the term NRI was often employed for elite students regardless of whether they had ever lived overseas. The 'posh' stereotype according to which people's class status was judged included fair skin, well-built or fat bodies, new fashionable fitting clothing, large expensive vehicles and fluent English. A kind of hexis, that is, embodied habitus (Bourdieu 1984), was also discussed in relation to elite groups. A group of junior college students (former Riversdale students) told me that people try to emulate Bollywood in their walking and talking styles. One student demonstrated, walking with his arms out from the body and shoulders pushed far back like a body builder or action hero, and described this as a 'muscular' walking style. Others referred to an upper-class apathy when they talked about walking 'loosely': "nowadays being lazy is a fashion". While these attributes were in themselves positively valued, middle-class informants constructed the elite, like the poor, as morally inferior.

The elite were constructed as lacking in decency and respectability partially in relation to their money which was believed to have been earned without hard work and to be spent without proper concern for its value. A lower middle-class St Catherine's father told me,

Upper-class people are born with money. They think they are put on this earth only to enjoy themselves and they spend money on whatever they want. This is maybe because they have no aim or goal in life. Middle-class people work hard to achieve something whereas upper-class people have everything they need already. Many don't even work. They simply spend money. Those who earn money know the value of every single rupee. Upper-class people don't know the value of money.*

The immorality of the elite was also evident in their involvement in 'dirty things' such as dating and pubs. The chairman of a middle to upper middle-class school said that parents moved their children to his school from more expensive schools because they thought their children would get 'spoilt' (ruined rather than pampered) in these other schools. He thought that parents who sent their children to these more expensive schools were likely to encourage pre-marital relationships (which he did not approve of) because of their wealth. The principal of a similar school told me: "I think in today's world when you have too much of money they are probably into other social activities and they have less time. When you have money it is easy to get into [bad] habits. There is nobody to monitor you." Some suggested that upper classes engage in these behaviours as they were seen as a source of status: "They think going to five star hotels, dancing and drinking in pubs, these are good things, having a boyfriend, trying to have relation with two or three people, this a good culture, that is a status symbol. That is how they think, rich people, whereas middle-class people don't think that way" (Upper middle-class St Catherine's father).

Most, however, explained the different behaviour of the upper classes or elites in terms of their lack of concern for the opinions of others and their ability to buy their way out of problems:

AG: Why do you think upper-class people go to pubs more than middle-class people?

Middle middle-class Riversdale teacher: It's just the way they think. They're in that society so they go along with their society. They do not have fear of others commenting on them. But in middle class we have a fear somewhere in the corner that somebody would say something.*

High class does what they gonna do. That's the rule because they've got enough money. Even if they've done some accident, other person will come and sit in the car, license will be changed. Nothing is going to happen. He will pay the cash to the person. Done. Any case or anything, money is going to rule the things (Upper middle-class male, recent overseas graduate).

Upper-class people, I don't know what problem they have; maybe deciding how to spend all their money. Upper class, if they are rich they try to break the rules. They have confidence. Even college kids think if I do mistakes my dad or mom will save me* (Middle middle-class Riversdale mother).

Another common explanation for the bad behaviour of the elite was their upbringing. It was widely believed that the elite do not take proper care of their children. The mother of a Riversdale student told me that if a father is a wealthy businessman he might not concentrate on his children. He

might simply provide them with a car and pocket money and this would leave the children free to engage in practices such as dating. In contrast, participants told me, middle-class parents teach moral values and monitor their children's behaviour at all times so there is no chance that they can 'go for dating'. In a discussion of the lack of discipline at an expensive elite school, a St Catherine's father told me that Venkatesh, a movie star whose daughter attends that school, does not always know what his daughter is doing because he is busy with his work and sends someone else to pick her up. He went on to explain that children who belong to wealthy families do not feel responsibilities because they were not guided properly by their parents. According to participants, wealthy mothers and fathers are too busy in their work as their main concern is to accumulate wealth. Because they spend so little time together, there is a lack of affection between parents and children and this may result in these children 'spoiling' (ruining) their lives. The headmistress of an expensive elite school told me:

Current parents [of students at her school] are all from IT and their salaries would be something around two lakhs [Rs 200,000] per month. I would call them upper middle-class. And I have a lot of problems with this type of people because of behavioural problems. The families are very small. There is no time for the parents. The children are almost left alone. They stay all by themselves. No elders to support. Parents are always out of station [town] and on the move. Nobody to take care of them. Handling such type of children is very difficult. The basic reason is the luxury and wealth has spoiled the environment because in many families the male member is either in the Gulf area or the US. The income has gone up. As a family together they don't do any work. Lots of luxury has entered into the house. Many gadgets have entered into the life and that has brought a lot of distance into the family.

At college and university the 'posh gang' were routinely characterized as rebellious and disinterested in studies. For example, a college student and older sister of a Riversdale student told me that the posh 'NRI' students bunk colleges, "roam around" and "do all naughty things". A young male software worker was similarly critical:

At my college there were three gangs – the posh gang, the normal gang and the mass gang. Posh means playing jokes on a lecturer, wearing *chappels* [flip-flops/sandals] to the office – branded *chappels* so as to be different from others. They won't mix with everyone. They'll only mix with those who come to college in a car. You won't find any topper in the posh gang or any person who studies well.

In the interview excerpt below, Swetha, Vamsi and Vamsi's junior college friends communicate their views of the elite through a discussion of software workers. As Carol Upadhy (2008: 55-6) has noted, software workers have "a social and symbolic significance beyond their numbers" because of their high salaries, the 'global' nature of their work, and their involvement in the industry attributed with launching India into a more prominent place on the global stage. Although there is no evidence to suggest that these stereotypes are accurate (Fuller & Narasimhan 2006b), middle-class people nevertheless project anxieties about social change onto software workers:

Friend: Some software engineers are there, both wife and husband are software engineers, it's like a school timing. Morning 8 they will go, evening 6 they will return.

Swetha: They don't cook in their house. They'll just get it from outside. They won't have vessels. They'll just get tiffins [snacks] from outside, they'll have their lunch in some hotel and evening also they'll get some curry. They won't prepare anything in their house. My Telugu teacher told me about a family, they are rich people it seems. They will not have any utensils in their house. Because they will just buy it from outside, eat it in those things and then throw those things. Then there will not be any use of utensils. There are even people like that. They just eat, sleep, eat, sleep ... They were a rich family so they'll have much money behind them so they'll eat, they'll sleep, they'll eat, they'll sleep. That's it. They'll not do anything else. They'll not open the doors. They'll not let fresh air come into the house.

Vamsi: These software jobs are like, we have to go, come. And weekends go to pub or any disco, again come. They're not enjoying their native villages. Some Saturdays they're having holidays and they're going outside, out of the state. In holidays also they are going outside – Australia, America, but they're not enjoying their native [place], the olden India ...

Friend: Not only nativity [native place]; they'll also not know about what is there in their surroundings. They'll not go for any amusement park or what about the situation of their colony or ... their surroundings.

Swetha: Who is there in this house, they'll not care what's going on in the next house. If a person is beating his wife or someone is killing someone, they won't care. 'Let them do whatever they want, we are safe, that's enough.'

Friend: 'We are safe, that's enough.' They just don't bother about what the other person is doing. 'Let him do; his house, his wife, his children. He must do whatever he wants to do. Why will I bother?'

Vamsi: They are doing favour for themselves, not for the society. They are thinking 'Me, my children, my family should be well' ...

Friend: And because of their jobs they'll just go in the morning and come back in the evening. At that time of elections or voting thing, they're just like, 'Ok, we have to vote. We have to elect a leader.' So they don't know much about that leader so they just blindly vote him. Some people won't vote at all.

Vamsi: The holiday for the voting will be utilized to go on some tour.

Friend: Some tours or some late-night party. They just don't have, they are just lack of general knowledge, basic knowledge.

Swetha, Vamsi and Vamsi's friends criticize the extent to which rich people have withdrawn from society, have no interest in what is going on around them, and care only about the well-being of their household. Like many participants, they associate wealth with selfishness and what was often referred to as a 'mechanical life' (see also Upadhyaya 2008: 64) devoid of the kind of familial and community sociality believed to be central to 'Indian values' (see below).

Although upper-class individuals displayed many characteristics that were positively valued by my middle-class informants, these informants nevertheless rejected the lifestyles of the elite on the grounds that they involve indecent behaviour, laziness, a failure to appreciate the value of money and a lack of concern for social norms and the opinions of others. Unlike the poor who are depicted as innately inferior, the failures of the elite are explained in terms of their easy access to money and poor parenting associated with long working hours.

Attitudes toward the elite are, like those toward the poor, characterized by ambiguity. My middle-class informants recognized the status and power of the elite and sought to emulate them particularly in their consumption and use of English. At the same time they were very critical of the excesses of the elite and their lack of concern for 'decency'. As Säävälä (2010: 139) argues, "Middle-class Indians do not do their utmost to emulate the elite; on the contrary, they consider the elite

immoral and even offensive, while simultaneously prestigious and mesmerising”. Their emulation thus had to be limited, carefully controlled so as not to escape the boundaries of middle-class propriety and so to legitimate these boundaries, their trajectories, and their status (Bourdieu 1984).

The Morality and Indianness of the Middle Classes

In contrast to unrefined poor and the hedonistic excesses of the elite, the middle class was valorised by participants for its normality, its moderateness, its avoidance of extremes. Participants commonly described middle-class people and lifestyles as normal and decent. In doing so they discursively naturalized middle-class lifestyles and constructed the poor and the elite as morally deviant. Like the middle classes in Baroda studied by van Wessel (2001: 29), they distinguished themselves from the poor understood to be uncivilized and the elite who were believed to have abandoned established morality.

The middle classes were constructed as those who behave decently and responsibly in large part because they care about the opinions of others.

The middle middle class and the lower middle class is very concerned with their image and how others perceive them. They spend so much time thinking about what the rest of the world thinks of them and not about what they think of themselves so they never transcend boundaries. They don't know any better. They have always been taught to be in a certain way (Upper middle-class female young professional).

There is a feeling in their hearts that if they have to survive in this society they need to be scared of others and not only others, they have to think about the self respect ... It's their mentality. That's it (Middle middle-class female St Catherine's teacher).

Both of these informants describe concern for the opinions of others with a critical tone, but such concern was positively valued in some contexts. These informants describe a blind and unthinking obedience to social norms out of concern for public image that was scorned by many. However, thoughtful and 'balanced' concern for the opinions of others was positively valued as a sign of respect for society and was also seen as a necessity for the middle classes who cannot rely entirely on their wealth to establish a good position in society. As two young Riversdale teachers explained, middle-class people care about their prestige and moral values because “their only means of survival, they think, are their moral values”. The rich, on the other hand, feel they can do anything because they have “the money power”.

This tension between different sources of status was also evident in descriptions of the middle classes as caught between the high and the low. Informants suggested that this in-between-ness was a source of anxiety:

All these problems come to middle class people. High class people and low class people don't bother. Middle class, we are always in a dilemma regarding something we should do or shouldn't do* (Upper middle-class female college student).

Middle class is the class which is sandwiched between so many values, so many aspects of life, whereas the higher society and the poverty society, they live freely. They don't have fear and hesitation on what they do. That living style is completely different. Middle class have so many ifs and buts for everything they want to do. They're not free in making any decisions. For example, if there is a marriage, in middle class people will start thinking about caste and sects. That will not be there in higher. And abundant freedom is given. There is no stopping anything – celebrations, marriages, spending. Middle class will think in so many ways, whether to invest in particular land or not, whereas higher once they think it should be spent they spend* (Upper middle-class Riversdale father).

These informants identify the ambiguous nature of their moral and status systems that arise from attempts to distance themselves from both the poor and the elite. The above discussion illustrates how the middle class in Hyderabad is constructed as a moral and civilized community in opposition to the elite and the poor. It is not just personal morality but concern for the moral judgement of others that is seen as characteristically middle-class. Middle-class propriety was often taken for granted as self-evidently 'moral', but its 'goodness' was also justified in terms of its Indianness.

While in Victorian England the middle classes understood themselves to be pious and churchgoing in contrast to the heathen working class and the feckless aristocrats, in contemporary Hyderabad the morality of the middle is understood in terms of its concern for 'Indian culture and traditions' in contrast to the cultureless poor and the Westernized elite. Hindu religiosity was a pervasive part of middle-class life in Hyderabad – most families I knew visited temples regularly, organized *pujas* in their homes and workplaces for significant events, and made pilgrimages to sacred sites, particularly Tirupati and, for men, the temple of Ayyappan in Sabarimala, Kerala, returning with *prasadam* (sacred food) to share with friends and colleagues. Some performed daily *pujas* and fasting was common among the teachers, particularly at Riversdale. Nevertheless, although formal Hindu religion played a role in some informants' narratives of their morality, a more generalized (albeit undeniably upper-caste Hindu) Indian culture was the primary frame of reference for most.¹⁵

A number of recent accounts suggest that middle-class Indians' ideas about themselves as 'Indian' are constructed in opposition to an imagined immoral 'Western culture' (e.g., Radhakrishnan 2011b; van Wessel 2001; Parry 2001). My informants expressed similar views in a fairly uniform picture of Western life, derived, it seemed, from the reports of other Indians and media accounts of the lives of celebrities. According to informants, all Westerners leave home at the age of 16 and remain largely independent of their parents from this point onwards. They receive little financial or

¹⁵ This contrasts with the work of other researchers who have emphasized the significance of religion to middle-class identity. Säävälä (2010: 151-2), for example, argues that "By actively engaging in religiosities ... new middle-class Hindus mark their difference from a secularised, immoral and 'Westernised' elite. Religion is among the major moral discursive fields in which the superiority of the middle class is enacted". With the exception of a few informants who prayed daily, most of the middle-class Hyderabadis I spoke to appeared to take religion almost for granted, going through the motions of religious festivals with little expressed concern for the moral virtues of such activities. Despite the abundance of religious activity, nobody cited faith or Hinduness as a source of their moral values. Because Hindu nationalism has already been extensively explored by those researching the new Indian middle classes, I will not devote significant attention to the Hinduness of people's ideas of 'Indian culture' in this thesis.

emotional support from their parents and in turn provide none of this support for their parents in their old age. Westerners were believed to marry without concern for the opinions of their parents and to divorce, often several times, when they fall in love with someone else. The distance between parents and their children and the breakdown of marriages were taken as evidence that Westerners have much less 'love and affection' for their family members than Indians. Alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, pubs, dating and revealing clothing were other key symbols of 'Western culture.' Participants had two explanations for this very different approach to family life, sexuality and consumption. One, there are no rules in Western culture; people can do whatever they want. Two, the same rules apply in the West as in India (the morality of 'Indian culture' is self-evident), but Westerners break these rules with gay abandon as there are no consequences in part because everyone has plenty of money. For example, almost all informants assumed that arranged marriage is an ideal in the West as it is in India, and that Westerners upset their parents when they have love marriages.

This view of Western culture was so entrenched that when I began at the end of fieldwork to impart examples of enduring love and support between Western family members and to suggest that Westerners have *different* values that, for example, reject the practicality of arranged marriages, I was met with disbelief and the assertion that my family must be exceptional. I was somewhat taken aback by this stereotype and asked informants on several occasions how they could believe that people in one country have more love and affection than others, that a society could exist with no values, or that there could be such widespread disregard for social 'rules'. Their answers suggested that such stereotypes persist due to a combination of a lack of exposure to aspects of Western culture likely to challenge the stereotype, and the importance of the stereotype as a 'straw man' against which to construct the virtue of Indian middle-class culture. Informants watched very little television produced outside of India other than the occasional Hollywood blockbuster and read very little or no non-Indian fiction, newspapers or magazines. Although some of my upper middle-class informants had spent time working overseas, many appeared to have had very little contact with non-Indians outside of work. They thus had little cause to question the Occidental stereotype and were not in any case inclined to do so considering the importance of this stereotype to nationalist pride.

'Western culture' had some positive associations for informants, however. A few people talked positively of 'western thinking' which was described as scientific, in contrast to blind beliefs and superstitions, and as 'broad-minded' or 'open-minded.' Western clothing was positively valued for its comfort. The West was seen as superior to India in its state of development and its technology. Informants assumed that all Westerners are wealthy and associated a 'luxurious lifestyle' with Western culture. While this was sometimes negatively interpreted as a sign of Western laziness, this lifestyle was a central image in many informants' aspirations for wealth. Such positively valued characteristics were, however, rarely directly described as Western. Thus, although there was an ambivalent attitude toward the West "shifting between desire and fear, attraction and repulsion" (Säävälä 2010: 120; see

also 205-06; Favero 2005: 101), the West was a much stronger symbol of immorality than it was of progress and development.

Informants told me that the influence of the West is the primary source of change in Hyderabad. They talked about changes in clothing (jeans, 'pant-shirt' and skirts), food ('pizza-burger') and language (English) as well as increasing consumption of alcohol and drugs and the rise of smoking, 'pub culture', dating and divorce. Like the middle classes studied by van Wessel (2001: 163-4) in Baroda, my informants described young people as particularly influenced, attracted by something new and different and the 'fashion' of Western consumables and practices. But it was the elite who were believed to be leading the charge in terms of Westernization. As a middle middle-class Riversdale mother told me, "Rich people they adopt new culture, new things very easily. So that way they don't care about the tradition or culture."* Many participants directly stated that the elite are very Westernized and the association was also clear in the use of the term NRI (non-resident Indian) to refer to elite students at colleges and universities. It is unclear, therefore, whether 'fashion' emerges from an association with the West or an association with the elite. I suspect that it is the expense of Western clothing, food and pub culture that is central to their function as sources of class distinction and thus of fashion.

The simultaneous attraction to and rejection of Western and elite culture was reflected in informants' assertion that adoption of such culture should be 'within the limits'.

They [young people] are forgetting Indian culture, their traditions, and they're not being in their limits* (Female St Catherine's tenth class student).

According to my opinion adopting foreign culture is not good or bad. Use it, but don't cross limits* (Lower middle-class male St Catherine's teacher).

It [Indian culture] is changing in every sphere, in every aspect – dressing, food habits, living, everything. People are going to clubs, they also started dating. As long as you are in your limits, nothing can change you. You can live like a human being. You should have control over yourself ... Instead of *chapattis* they are eating pizza and burgers, but boys and girls are still in their limits (Middle middle-class female Riversdale teacher).

As long as it's under the limits it [change] is good. Cross the limits, it's not good. Spending long nights in the pubs – I don't think that's good culture. Some people are crossing the limits. I feel that it's going to be the majority crossing the limits (Upper middle-class female Riversdale Teacher).

Attitudes toward the West shed some light on the tension between middle-class rejection and emulation of the elite. The elite are rejected because they are seen as overly Westernized and therefore morally corrupt. As Säävälä (2010: 139) observes, "The elite are considered immoral due to excessive westernisation, manifested in women's improper dress, sexual license, the consumption of alcohol, the loosening of family authority, disrespect toward religious sensibilities and avarice". The middle classes are constructed as superior in terms of their 'Indian' family values, sexual restraint, modest clothing and lack of 'bad habits' like smoking and drinking. Because preserving 'Indian

culture' is understood to be inherently positive, the middle-classes accord themselves moral status also for their avoidance of less value-laden aspects of Western culture such as food and modest Western clothing. The elite are, however, emulated to some extent because their lifestyles, like those of Westerners, are seen as prestigiously and fashionably luxurious. Status can therefore be achieved through display of expensive, elite, Western consumer goods and engagement in expensive, elite, Western activities such as drinking in pubs, but for the middle-classes, who are more financially constrained than the elite, these sources of status must be balanced with adherence to 'Indian morality' and 'Indian culture'. Elite practices are also emulated to some extent for their perceived progressiveness and open-mindedness as was evident in relation to caste (Chapter 2) and, as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, in relation to education (Chapter 4) and women's roles (Chapters 5 to 7).

A logical extension of the construction of the middle classes as more Indian than the elite, is that the poor are the most Indian class. Middle-class informants told me frequently that if I wanted to see the 'real India' I had to go to the villages. The close association between villages and poverty suggests that the poor were in some ways seen as the 'real India'. For the most part, however, participants did not frame their difference from the poor in terms of Indianness, talking instead of their own progressiveness and open-mindedness versus the conservativeness and backwardness of the poor. In addition, the poor were described as cultureless, closer to nature in their inability to control their anger, sexuality, and other impulses. Another way of articulating in Telugu the distinction between those of higher status and those of lower status is through the terms *anaagarikulu* – lacking in culture or not having proper culture – and *naagarikulu* – having good or high culture in the sense of knowing the systems, knowing how to behave with others and giving respect. Those of low class-caste status are thus excluded not only from class status games but also from imagination of Indian culture.

The lower classes were also often accused of blindly adopting 'Western' culture, particularly the clothing, which was perceived as an ignorant and somewhat desperate attempt to gain status: "In educated families, western culture doesn't influence so much but in medium and low families it does. These people don't know the clear picture of what is done and why. They just copy others" (Middle middle-class female Riversdale teacher). Such sentiments were also evident in Jaya Krishna's comments about the 'punks' on the street discussed in the previous chapter. Like Liechty's middle-class informants in Kathmandu who criticized those 'below' them for attempting to 'do fashion', my informants were scornful of lower-class efforts to engage in prestigious forms of consumption. They suggested that "one should be what one is. To appear to be what you are not ... is both unsuitable and immoral" (Liechty 2003: 76).

The middle-class thus define their sense of propriety in terms of its superior Indianness. Their ability to invest in and gain status from expensive, elite, Western consumer goods and expensive, elite, Western activities such as drinking in pubs is limited by their finances. They must therefore

achieve or maintain status through other means, particularly by observing rules of decency and thus establishing a 'good name in society'. It is for this reason that middle-class people say again and again that social change, Westernization of emulation of the elite has to be 'balanced' or 'within the limits'.

Respectable Consumption

A key arena in which this tension between the decency of middle-class reserve and the status of wealth can be observed is consumption. Divya, a young female professional from an old middle-class family explained class to me in this way:

Obviously it's about the tangibles – a certain kind of car, certain kinds of clothes. More money means different fashions are available to you. It's about jewellery, house, way you talk, dress. For example if a middle-class guy wore a pair of slippers [flip-flops] and walked out he would look stupid, but if a high-class guy stepped out with slippers with a puma on them he would look fine ... The first thing anybody who comes into money does is show it off. A new car parked outside a small house says something. If you use your money to move from the small house to the bigger house you have to tell everyone that you once lived in a small house for them to realize that you're moving up. There are different cars that are associated with lower middle classes and middle middle classes and there are 20 year loans so anyone can get a car.*

Here Divya identifies the role of consumption in creating distinctions between people of different class backgrounds. While, 'slippers' are a stereotypically village-poor form of footwear, the foreign label on the 'puma' slippers identifies them as expensive and thus 'fashion'. Because of their village or *errabus* associations, the wearing of slippers is a risky business and is only possible without threat to status for those whose superior class position is well-established. Divya suggests that conspicuous consumption is a consciously deployed technique in status games, such that new wealth is more likely to be invested in a car than in a new home. Her critical tone indicates that the legitimacy of consumption-based status games is in question despite their apparent pervasiveness. In this section I will demonstrate that both engaging in and criticising consumption as a means of distinction are central to middle-class culture in Hyderabad.

More interest has been shown by academics, the media and the general public in the consuming habits of the urban middle classes than in any other aspect of their lifestyles. Although the new middle classes are often championed as a symbol of India's new post-liberalization ability to compete and consume on a global stage, they also face harsh criticism for their supposed hedonism and mindless status games. In both media (Reifeld 2003: vii) and academic (e.g. Das 2002; Gupta 2000) accounts the decline of the old, English-educated, idealistic, tolerant and secular bourgeoisie is often lamented as commentators berate the uninhibited, ostentatious, pragmatic and amoral new middle class (Markovits 2003: 50). The new middle classes are said to be enjoying unprecedented levels of affluence which they invest in hedonistic and conspicuous consumption. Varma, for example, suggests that economic liberalization has freed the middle classes "from even the pretence

of any notion of restraint or reticence in the unchecked pursuit of its consumerist aspirations” (1998: 175).

There can be no doubt that there have been changes in the consumption patterns of many middle-class families as seen in the growing bar and restaurant culture, the increasing consumption of luxury foods and the rising expenditure on gym memberships, travel, fashion, children’s entertainment and dowry. These changes have “contributed to the growing significance of lifestyle as a status marker of middle class identity” (Fernandes 2006: 73). However, recent scholarship warns against conflating consumption with consumerism, and the emerging new rich who can afford these luxuries with the middle class in general (van Wessel 2004; Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase 2008; Fernandes 2006). My research provides further support for the inaccuracy of such conflation.

Margit van Wessel (2004: 94) found that when she spoke to members of the middle classes in Baroda about their lives, they “invariably turned to the topic of consumption as central to the experience of modern life”. Among the middle classes in Hyderabad, this was true only of the middle and upper middle classes. Although members of the lower middle class occasionally commented on changing consumption patterns and sometimes engaged in discourses of clothing, vehicles, housing and education as symbols of, and routes to, the good life, their own consumption did not extend far beyond the essentials. When they talked about money it was usually in relation to rising food prices and the difficulty of paying school fees. As with the Kolkata lower middle classes studied by Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase, they were more concerned with “simple daily survival, good quality housing and food, and a solid, English-medium education for their children” (2008: 73; see also Säävälä 2010: 121).

The relative lack of non-essential consumption among the lower middle class stands in contrast to media images of a homogenous affluent consumerist middle class. As Leela Fernandes argues, the notion that the middle class is benefiting from globalization reflects the conflation of “English-speaking urban white-collar segments of the middle class who are benefiting from new employment opportunities (particularly in private-sector employment)” (2006: xviii) and the middle classes as a whole (see also Lakha 1999: 265). Like Fernandes, Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase (2008: 11) highlight the disparity in wealth and lifestyles between upper and lower ends of the middle class. They argue that “there is a stark contradiction between the rhetoric and reality of structural adjustment and globalisation for the middle classes” (2008: 3). Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase’s research suggests that although opportunities for the middle classes have increased, for most families liberalization has resulted in a marked decline in overall living standards due to a dramatic rise in the cost of living, increasing debt, and increasing competition for jobs and housing. My research has not involved tracking such changes, but it was obvious that the life experiences of lower middle-class participants were vastly different from media images of middle-class affluence. It is for this reason that I refer to the middle classes and seek to illustrate the difficulties of upward social mobility for lower middle-class families.

In contrast to lower middle-class participants, those from the middle and upper middle classes spent a lot of time talking about what they had bought recently and how much it had cost. Riversdale teachers sold cosmetics, Tupperware and clothing to each other at school. For upper middle-class participants shopping was a common leisure pursuit with weekends frequently spent browsing in malls or attending ‘exhibitions’ where they could buy clothing, jewellery or household goods. A family I knew well came home from one such exhibition with a vegetable steamer, a juicer and a Rs 5,000 aluminium picnic table that they had only bought because the daughter would not stop crying until they did so. I knew many middle to upper middle-class women who purchased a new item of clothing every couple of weeks and most middle to upper middle-class women had enough changes of everyday clothing to last them several weeks. An upper middle-class Riversdale teacher told me proudly that she could wear a different outfit every day for three months. Most of these women bought new saris for every festival and wedding, as well as on their birthdays and wedding anniversaries. According to Leela Fernandes, “Despite widespread national anxieties around the spread of Western-style consumerism in India, there is economic uncertainty in the Indian middle class that has not yet allowed the kind of consumerism associated with advanced industrialized societies” (2006: 81). This did appear to be the case in suburban Hyderabad in relation to large purchases such as cars and household appliances. Nevertheless, consumerism did appear to have taken hold in the realm of relatively inexpensive items such as clothing for middle and upper middle-class participants.

The degree to which consumables were status-accruing appeared to be primarily determined by their cost. A distinction between money and taste was seldom made by anyone other than my wealthiest acquaintances. Talking about the price of things was not taboo. Indeed, the cost of something seemed to be discussed among my participants every time a person mentioned they had purchased something or appeared with a new item. When planning what to wear to a wedding with my first host family, I showed them a necklace that I had brought from the UK. They liked it very much and asked how much it had cost. I answered truthfully as I knew the item to be expensive but not extravagant by local standards. The family seemed impressed by the price and I heard it repeated at least five times to different family members during our visit to their ancestral village (or ‘native place’). It appeared to be the case that, as van Wessel (2004: 101) has written of suburban Baroda, “money and consumption are so essential and interchangeable in the battle for status that consumption seems to express little more than financial power”.

However, far from being a straightforward route to status, consumption is morally fraught territory (van Wessel 2001; 2004; Srivastava 2011; cf. Brosius 2010). Participants seemed to spend as much time expressing moral discourses critical of consumption as they did buying things. Accordingly, I argue along with Upadhyaya (2008: 57) that “it is *discourses about* consumption, more than consumption itself, that have become constitutive of contemporary middle class identity”. In Hyderabad, these discourses centred on the following targets of moral censorship: showing greater

concern for expense than quality; consumption that was deemed excessive (respectable middle class consumption should be 'within the limits'); and conspicuous consumption for the express purpose of attracting attention and status.¹⁶

Although I have suggested that middle-class Hyderabadis were on the whole primarily concerned with how much things cost rather than notions of taste or style, they were themselves very critical of this approach. This market value approach to status was something that people were aware of and something that they tried to distance themselves from. For example, Nirmala, an upper middle-class housewife and mother of a St Catherine's student, often joked about another woman who lived in her gated community. She told me that this woman was overly concerned with how much things cost and strongly believed that the more expensive something was, the better it was. She was always encouraging Nirmala to buy a bigger and more expensive television and refrigerator. Nirmala was most amused when this friend was admitted to hospital for appendicitis and was disappointed with the cost of the operation – she had hoped to be charged more as she thought this would earn her greater status. Regardless of the accuracy of Nirmala's joking, it alerts us to the extent to which this style of consumerism has become an easily recognized 'type', widely subject to derision.

Concern for cost regardless of quality was believed by most to be a characteristic of 'society' in general and was not usually associated with a particular group. According to Divya, however, members of the middle middle class are most likely to consume in this way: "The middle middle class has to decide which way to go to. They're all wannabees. For them the definitions and the tangibles hold good. It is important for them to talk about what they bought and how much it cost. They're willing to spend". An upper middle-class St Catherine's father associated concern for cost with the new rich: "my cousin married a girl who is lower middle-class and he stays in States so within 15 days she changed her behaviour like saying 'Oh you see my sari cost is this', and she makes the point that saying, 'See I am spending this'". This is consistent with my observations – the lower middle class did not have the means to consume whereas the upper middle class and elite were sensitive to and critical of discussions of money and in some cases showed concern for taste. It was the middle middle class and the newly upper middle class who took the most literal approach to consumption-based status games. Like Liechty's (2003: 136) middle-class informants in Kathmandu, they displayed a "focused earnestness" toward consumption and a "need to boast about new acquisitions" in contrast to the upper middle class and elite who have less to prove. This was evident not only in terms of talking about and valuing highly expensive goods, but also in terms of a style of dress that involved matching (clothing, shoes, jewellery and make-up), and 'loud' or gaudy signs of expense such overtly branded clothing, elaborate embroidery, fiddly tailoring and ostentatious jewellery. While the elite and some members of the upper middle-class made fun of what they saw as an outdated and overly flashy style of dressing, the middle middle classes often failed to recognize more subtle signs of expense in elite clothing and saw such clothing as overly 'simple.'

¹⁶ See O'Dougherty (2002) for a discussion of similar criticisms of materialism and discourses of tasteful, moral consumption in middle-class Brazil.

In Hyderabad, as in Baroda, “The matter of fact recognition that ‘Money is everything’ is also a bitter one” (van Wessel 2004: 101). Informants suggested that money and the expense of consumer items are a primary source of status and many seemed themselves to accord greater status to more expensive items. However, they suggested that this should not be the case – that money should be secondary to education and moral values in determining the status of a person and that expense should be secondary to quality in determining the status of consumer goods.

Related to the criticism of valuing expensive rather than quality goods, was criticism of consumption that was believed to be intentionally status-seeking or a flaunting of wealth. It was widely acknowledged that people could improve their status through conspicuous consumption:

... number of cars and a big house with lawn, lot many comforts, creature comforts in their house, buying lot of gold, expensive clothes, like that ... They don’t need that much big house when two or three of the people are going to stay, but still they want to show their status. And they feel that if they stay in that big house, if they buy that much big house and a number of cars, they feel that they get that much respect from society, that they’re rich (Madhu, middle middle-class female Riversdale teacher).

Weddings were most frequently mentioned as examples of something on which a person would spend extravagantly in order to attract the admiration of others. This was presented as an irrational and wasteful expense. Madhu, the Riversdale teacher quoted above, talked also about how house-warming rituals, previously small family *pujas*, had become occasions for status displays involving expensive invitations to as many people as possible and elaborate feasts.¹⁷ Children’s birthday parties had similarly become opportunities for status display. She said that status of any event will be measured by the number of guests and the number and cost of food items on the menu.

So usually it has been started with the people who are rich. They want to celebrate their children’s birthday to show their status. So these people, those who are not that rich, are also getting attracted to it and started celebrating it. It’s a minimum thing now. It’s a minimum thing. So if we don’t celebrate the birthdays like that ... they might feel bad ... It’s the show off I believe ... They are earning lot of money compared to the previous generation. My father’s generation used to earn max of 20,000. The person who is earning 20,000 was a person with rich salary, high salary. But nowadays it’s in lakhs [hundreds of thousands]. So that money is making, the instant money is making them to do all this.

Because goods were valued primarily in terms of their monetary worth, the consumption of the wealthy was often interpreted as an attempt to display wealth. People frequently criticized what Divya referred to as “the stereotypical arrogant rich guy who never misses the opportunity to show that he has more money”:

One of the major differences is rich people tend to exhibit their richness and don’t care about middle and lower until they want to employ them for something. Middle-class and lower-class people don’t want to exhibit their wealth. They just spend according to their earnings. But

¹⁷ See Säävälä (2003) for a discussion of the importance to middle-class culture of house-warming celebrations in Hyderabad.

upper class are very concerned to exhibit their wealth and to get others to work for them.”* (Lower middle-class St Catherine’s father)

An above-economic person goes and looks for a T-shirt that looks very costly and stylish and that he thinks will attract people. He doesn’t buy the T-shirt for himself; he buys it for others to admire (Young male software worker).

The rich were not the only targets of accusations of conspicuous consumption, however. People sometimes talked about the propensity of the new rich to engage in such practices:

When poor people get money they start going for pubs and branded clothing and they follow the foreign culture without knowing anything about it. They spend Rs 1,000 on a Rs 100 dress. They are passionate about the foreign next. Before they used to wear saris and now they are wearing jeans. This is not bad because they are also interested in the comfort. They are moving according to the generation. If a poor person sees money he doesn’t know how to spend the money. He wastes it. Whereas in proper families, they are not misusing the money; they are planning for their future growth^T (Middle middle-class St Catherine’s father).

In general, however, as with a preference for expensive goods, deliberately conspicuous consumption was believed to be a general social ill, spread fairly evenly across all sectors of the middle classes.

Whether it was a deliberate attempt to display wealth or not, ‘excessive’ consumption was also the target of criticism. Riversdale had an explicit policy of discouraging excessive consumption. Drawing on Gandhian principles, the school encouraged students to ‘live life the lean way’, did not allow them to bring chocolates to school on their birthdays, and provided cheap stationery to prevent students buying (and losing) expensive stationery. Like participants in Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase’s research (2008), Riversdale staff were critical of excessive consumption, which was seen as incompatible with middle-class mores of refinement, reservedness, politeness and education.

Many participants gave me examples of wealthy people buying expensive items of clothing when identical items were available elsewhere for a significantly lower price: “I buy a skirt for a certain amount. A rich person will buy the same skirt exactly for a much higher price just because they buy it at a different place. If you tell them they could have got it for less somewhere else they say they don’t want to go there because it’s a cheap place” (Upper middle-class female college student). Here it was the unnecessary expenditure, the lack of proper concern for the value of money that was the target of criticism. A young man from a very poor family found the lavish lifestyles of his software colleagues wasteful:

They take a lot of amount [money], they drink, they eat, they go in cars, they spend money in going to different places, very costly places I would say. These are very costly. If you go to a normal hotel, you get a plate biryani for Rs 100. They go to a hotel where you get it for 700, 800 rupees. So they like to spend money. They like to spend money for their girlfriends, giving them costly gifts, throwing very big parties to friends, which is not necessary I feel.*

This concern for reserve in matters of consumption was recognized by my wealthier informants – those at the upper end of upper middle class and the elite. Such informants had identified a middle-class cautiousness and criticized those who had money but did not spend it:

Just because they move from lower middle class to middle middle class and to upper middle class doesn't mean they're going to suddenly start living like a typical upper middle-class family ... They never grow out of this fear that some day they might lose all the money. This fear makes them work hard and this fear makes the high class richer. Hard work is the only thing the middle class knows. For the middle class hard work is the solution to everything (Upper middle-class female young professional).

From what I noticed, people in Hyderabad are filthy rich. They are rich enough to burn money for the rest of their lives and not bother working. But the problem is they don't know how to spend the money that they have. So you might have the money, but the status is not there (Upper middle-class female college student).

These comments suggest that concern for reserve is a particularly middle-class moral discourse and is not recognized as a legitimate form of distinction by upper class sectors.

In all of these middle-class discourses of consumption, concern for propriety and reserve was evident. Excess was disparaged whether it was a matter of expense, status ambition or exceeding the budget. Thus, while people acknowledged that conspicuous consumption *is* a source of status, they questioned whether it *should* be. Their solution to this problem was to distance themselves from the problematic consumption of others through criticism and to present their own consumption, however ostensibly status-attracting, as 'within the limits' of middle-class respectability:

They spend almost five times what I spend. They are too comfortable actually. They need a car to come to office. So whatever, whatever they buy it is unnecessary I feel. There are limits to everything so I don't do it (Young male software worker).

A middle-class person gets status by having their limits ... If he goes beyond that limits he cannot survive in middle and upper middle class because he has to know his limits and financial strength. In middle class he thinks his limits is to have his own house, some assets, a family car, that's all (Middle middle-class Riversdale father).

Further ambiguity is evident in relation to what consumption tells us about the morality of the middle classes. Conspicuous consumption appeared in informants' narratives as a general social ill, spread fairly evenly across all sectors of the middle classes and society more broadly. The middle classes were presented as almost entirely corrupted by immoral consumption practices. Most people sought to distance themselves from these forms of status-seeking consumption:

I can afford a car but I won't buy one. Instead I just drive my two-wheeler. But people like me are very small in size [number]. Most people want to show off their money as soon as they get it (Upper middle-class female young professional).

I don't do anything to show my status. My only goal is to keep my expenditure less than my earning. If I don't have any loans then that is status for me. People who spend heavily on

puja just to show status, it is a waste of money. They will not be living within their earnings^T (Lower middle-class St Catherine's father).

When distancing themselves from these practices, participants tended to construct themselves as moral exceptions in an otherwise deviantly consumerist society. Unlike Liechty's (2003: 79) middle-class informants who attempted to displace the contradictions of consumerism onto class others, the middle-class Hyderabadis I spoke to saw consumerist excess also as a feature of the middle classes. As Säävälä (2010: 122) has argued, "they tended to create an image of the average middle-class person as greedy and excessive, while defending themselves against the same charge". Although earlier sections have suggested that defining oneself as middle-class was a claim to membership in a moral community, here exists an apparently contradictory desire to dissociate from this community now defined as amoral. It is difficult to understand how the middle classes can be understood to be simultaneously defined by their morality and thoroughly corrupt.

I suggest that when participants identify as middle class and seek to distance themselves from the immorality of the elite and the poor, they construct an ideal middle class with which they want to be associated. They draw on middle-classness as an ideal based in notions of propriety when forming ideas about decent behaviour. However, rapid changes in Hyderabad's middle-class society and culture and pervasive media discourses of middle-class moral corruption have contributed to the belief that the reality of middle class life is far from this moral ideal. Participants do not, therefore, form a strong identity as middle class. They draw on and contribute to 'middle class' as an abstract body of moral discourse but do not situate themselves within the middle classes as a living community with which they might feel any sense of solidarity.¹⁸ This enables them to claim status both through identification with a moralized middle-class ideal, and through distancing from an amoral middle-class reality.

The Boundaries of Respect

As the pervasiveness of the phrase 'within the limits' indicates, borders and boundaries were integral to informants' understandings of class and of respectability. Limitations were not always a good thing in middle-class narratives, as can be seen in this Riversdale teacher's explanation of open-mindedness: "accepting everything, not limiting ourselves to the traditions and customs." The epitome of backwardness and deprivation for informants was represented by the villager whose experience of the world did not extend far beyond his or her village. The villager was understood to be too 'limited,'

¹⁸ See Fernandes (2000a: 614) and Liechty (2003) for discussions of the role of consumption in shaping national and class identities, and van Wessel (2004: 112) for the counterargument that discourses of consumption were used only to construct individual identities, not larger entities like the middle class or the nation. My participants' efforts to distance themselves from (morally corrupt) society suggest that they too sought to construct individual and not collective identities through their consumption-related ideals. However, frequent references to being a 'good citizen' makes it difficult to believe that ideas about consumption were in no way connected to ideas about what it means to be Indian.

insufficiently exposed or open-minded. As Bourdieu (1999: 127) argues, “the lack of capital intensifies the experience of finitude; it chains one to a place”. At the other end of the spectrum, the elite are characterized by their familiarity with a wide range of places, contexts and cultures. They have the most ‘exposure’ (see Chapter 4). In this sense, boundaries or limits are meant to be crossed in the interests of cosmopolitan knowledge and understanding. Expanding the boundaries of one’s experience is not, however, meant to involve crossing class(-caste) divides. Thus, increased ‘exposure’ is accompanied by the construction of new boundaries. The elite are defined not only by their greater physical mobility and breadth of experience, but also by their ability to cut themselves off from undesirable others. “Capital makes it possible to keep undesirable persons and things at a distance” (Bourdieu 1999: 127).

The significance to the Indian middle classes of constructing boundaries between self and other has been noted by several other scholars. Honour is linked to these boundaries such that the integrity of the inside – the body, the home, the community – has to be protected from the outside. Chakrabarty (1991: 25), for example, argues that in contrast to the ritually enclosed inside, the outside has a deeply ambiguous character, associated with dirt and disorder: “It is exposed and therefore malevolent. It is not subject to a single set of (enclosing) rules and ritual defining a community ... All that do not belong to the ‘inside’ (family/community) lie there ... It is, in other words, a place against which one needs protection.” Fernandes (2006: 60), too, has observed that the middle-class family is represented as a purified, self-contained and carefully bounded space, sanitized from the chaos of outdoor life. Respectability, then, requires either limits to movement, overt display of respectability in terms of dress or comportment (see Chapter 7) or the ability to physically separate oneself from the dirt and disorder of the outside.

Indian cities have not historically been divided into strictly class segregated spaces (Fernandes 2006: 145). There are poor in every area of Hyderabad – working as servants in the homes of the elite, operating road-side stalls, living in temporary shelters adjacent to building sites. As middle and upper class families are generally reliant on the labour of the lower classes for household work, street entrepreneurs are located in all neighbourhoods to provide these services. However, Hyderabad and other Indian cities are being transformed by the rapid growth in the number of exclusive spaces – international schools, pristine gated housing developments with names invoking a bucolic European paradise, enormous air-conditioned malls housing shops, restaurants and cinemas, and prohibitively expensive bars, pubs and cafés. The proliferation of segregated and protected upper-class lifestyle spaces has produced “a new aesthetics of class purity” (Fernandes 2006: 144) that relies on the construction of a form of interiority in the public sphere (Chatterjee 2003).

In Hyderabad upper middle classes and the elite are able to avoid poor and lower middle-class spaces almost entirely. As Carol Upadhyia (2009: 264) writes of Bangalore, the elite circulate through “spaces between home, work and the new sites of consumption in cocooned transport vehicles along designated arteries, engaging directly with the rest of the population only through casual and fleeting

encounters with the working poor who provide essential services to the middle class and the city.” Or in the words of a Riversdale father: “They [upper classes] will go in AC cars. They don’t have to have any contact with outside people. They mingle only with those in their status.”* It is this highly privatized world of the upper classes that enables them to engage in practices that lower classes deem morally dubious. A St Catherine’s father observed: “Rich people have many facilities. They are always safe. They travel by cars. But if a middle-class girl goes out for pub, people in society will watch her. They gossip, comment and talk badly about our children. So that’s why middle-class people don’t encourage this culture.”^T

The carving up of the city into different class-spaces added to the isolation of different sectors of Hyderabad’s fragmented middle class from one another. The lower middle class could not avoid public transport and walking and their ability to assert middle-class propriety was accordingly constantly under threat. They were also demarcated from middle and upper middle-class families by their consumption habits. Not only was their consumption more modest and unlikely to attract status, but it was also very much confined to the local suburb. Students at St Catherine’s had never heard of the large chain stores and malls where Riversdale students regularly shopped. Different sectors of the middle class had so little opportunity to interact with each other that within a few months of arriving in Hyderabad I was being told by participants that I knew more about how ‘the other half’ lives than they did. My informants appeared to have something of an “enclave gaze” arising in large part from the segregation produced by the growing elite “privatopia” (Brosius 2010: 141).

Spatialized practices of distinction and avoidance thus serve to reinforce the cultural fragmentation of the middle classes and to encourage the separation of different factions – lower, middle, upper – into different spheres of interaction. This spatial distance is legitimized through discursive moral distancing. These discourses and practices serve to solidify boundaries between classes and between different sectors of the middle class. These boundaries in turn act as barriers to class mobility and constantly threaten to thwart people’s efforts to attain and maintain middle class ‘respectability’.

Conclusion

Rather than viewing class as an external material structure existing prior to and outside of discourse and practice, this chapter has begun to locate class in how people evaluate and talk about the world they live in, the social, economic and cultural capitals they deploy, and how they interact with and present themselves to others. In particular I have explored how middle-class culture and identities in Hyderabad are constructed through moral narratives centred on notions of decency and respectability. Middle-class people claim the moral high ground in order to distinguish themselves from the elite and the poor. Morality enables them to assert the legitimacy of their domination of the

poor and to question the legitimacy of the status of the elite. While the consumption and display of expensive goods are recognized as prestigious, middle-class morality calls for limits to consumerism in the interests of reserve and restraint. An ideology of middle-class morality is given extra weight and legitimacy by its association with 'Indian culture' or 'Indian values'. Thus, middle-class Hyderabadis construct themselves as not only more respectable but also as more patriotic than the cultureless, unrefined poor and the Westernized, pleasure-seeking elite. However, because respectability is conceptualized to a large extent in terms of maintaining proper boundaries between self and undesirable other, the respectability of the elite is never at risk in quite the same way. While the elite seldom move beyond the physical boundaries of their exclusive privatized spaces, the middle classes, particularly middle and lower middle classes, have a greater reliance on moral boundaries of respectable, reserved behaviour and discourse.

Respectability is a widely recognised trope of middle-class culture (see, for example, Mosse 1985: 5). Following Bourdieu (1984), I argue that respectability is a 'taste of liberty' or 'distinction'. Through their concern for respectability, Hyderabad's middle classes display their distance from economic necessity borne of poverty, their ability to invest in 'doing things properly'. However, when considered in relation to the elite, respectability is a 'taste of necessity.' The middle classes simply cannot afford to consume on the same level as the elite and thus make a virtue of this necessity. Following Liechty (2003: 74), I contend that "For many who work to locate themselves in middle-class culture, it is often difficult to distinguish what is *suitable* from what is *necessary*, even if in most cases middle-class choices (or necessities) are cast in tones of moral superiority". As two young Riversdale teachers explained to me, because their 'money power' is limited, the 'survival' of the middle classes in status games depends on their investment in 'moral values'.

In this chapter I have described concern for respectability and decency in the abstract and in relation to consumption, but its primary signification is undoubtedly sexuality, particularly female sexuality. In subsequent chapters I consider the gendered nature of notions of respectability and how such values impact on efforts for reform in women's roles and changing ideas about love and marriage. First, however, I discuss another source of class status – education – and its relationship to an alternative morality of 'open-mindedness'.

‘Mugging Up’ and ‘Exposure’ in School Education

Travelling through the streets of suburban Hyderabad one is immediately struck by the profusion of signs advertising schools, colleges and other educational institutions. Education easily surpasses any other product in terms of number of advertisements. Interaction with suburban middle-class families reveals the extent of this educational fervour. In Hyderabad, as in other parts of India (Fuller & Narasimhan 2006b: 143), parents go to great lengths to ensure their children are able to attend the best possible schools, and children know that their primary objective in life is to get the best possible examination marks. A college student in the highest grossing Bollywood film of all time, *3 Idiots*, neatly encapsulates the centrality of education to middle-class life when he says, “If we don’t have a degree, we won’t have a job. If we don’t have a job, no father will give his daughter’s hand. The bank won’t give us a credit card and the world will never respect us”.

The importance attached to education was also evident in people’s talk. School examination marks were presented as central to a person’s identity. College students were frequently asked for their tenth class marks and little else when meeting someone for the first time. As the quote above indicates, high educational achievement is seen as the only secure route to a professional career, to the consumer lifestyle believed to be necessary to a respectable middle-class existence, and, as education and career are the major factors in determining a marital candidate’s attractiveness, to a desirable spouse. Education was also constructed as central to the civilized respectability of middle-class life. With ‘poor’ and ‘illiterate’ used fairly interchangeably it was a lack of education that was often held responsible for the crude speech, mentality and behaviour of those of low caste-class status. It is also through education that people can legitimately claim the open-mindedness that allows a relaxing of the standards of decency and respectability. While people expressed hesitation about the legitimacy of dividing people according to wealth or community, the divide between the educated and the uneducated was seen as one of great significance.

The close association between education and middle-class identity has a long history. As indicated in Chapter 1, the Indian middle classes were in many ways produced through ‘Western’ education and education continues to be the primary route to middle-class status. Education has long been viewed as prestigious in itself, and has been valued as an entry point into the professions and white-collar occupations. Engineering degrees have in recent decades been particularly coveted for their symbolic value and the large dowries they command. In the 1980s and 1990s across India the relationship between education and middle-class status began to take on new dimensions in response to new uncertainties created in part by a changing relationship with the state. The lower middle class began to intensify their investment in education (Jeffrey 2010: 39-40). In Andhra Pradesh this manifested in a mushrooming of private engineering colleges established by the state’s rural elite

(Upadhy 1988; 1997). By donating substantial amounts of money to promoting private colleges and paying the fees necessary to get their children admitted to them, this rural elite was able to acquire the cultural capital (engineering degrees) necessary to blend in with the cosmopolitan culture of the older urban elite (Upadhy 1997: 186-8). My informants continue this process of urbanization and acquisition of cultural capital through education.



FIGURE 6: School advertising in Miyapur

Engineering degrees are, however, no guarantee of a secure middle-class future and this is reflected in a diversification of educational styles. School advertisements range from those displaying the faces and marks of that year's 'toppers' to those showing happy young children using science equipment or engaged in cultural and sporting activities. Education is evidently important to people for different reasons. During my time in Hyderabad, despite being determined not to study pedagogical methods, I could not ignore the stark contrasts between different types of schools and the passion with which people criticized certain teaching styles. These contrasts, usually summarized in terms of 'international' versus 'normal' or 'traditional' schools, slowly revealed themselves to be about more than pedagogy. Schools and their different educational styles were very much about class, about status games, and about one's orientation towards the past and the future, the local and the global.

In this chapter I begin by discussing the significance attached to education as a form of status and a route to success before describing in detail the two schools in which I conducted research. The differences between St Catherine's and Riversdale reflect the emergence in the city of a new breed of 'international' schools which are more globally oriented in their focus on 'exposure' and progressiveness. I argue that these schools and the values that they embody serve to reproduce the dominance of the upper middle class and elite.

The Consequences of Education

Education, according to informants, is becoming increasingly important. As a middle middle-class Riversdale father explained, "In those days even if a person was uneducated they could live happily and comfortably, but now education is a must. Minimum education is compulsory even for the poor." Some were quite dramatic when explaining the importance of education, telling me that education is needed "to survive in the society" and that without education one can do no more than merely "exist". The consequences of education described by informants can be grouped into three broad categories: employment, respect and 'exposure'.

In their discussions of the value of education, St Catherine's parents consistently described their own struggles to survive financially without education and their hopes that education would provide their children with jobs that would save them from such struggles and remove the need to depend on others. While St Catherine's parents tended to state outright that education is important because "people tend to give respect and value to educated people,"^T Riversdale parents alluded to respectability when they identified an inability to speak and behave 'properly' as a distinguishing feature of the uneducated.

An educated person automatically knows how to behave in a society and about the moral values. An uneducated person does not know about moral values. There is a difference in the way they speak and behave. When a person travels, if they meet another person they show some respect in the way they greet others and how they ask, 'How are you and how are you doing?' An uneducated person doesn't know how to show respect in the way they speak and greet ^T (Upper middle-class Riversdale mother).

An upper middle-class Riversdale father directly associated the respectable, middle-class 'Indian values' described in the previous chapter with education: "We have our own system in India which has to be maintained and protected. We have marriage bonding which is not available in other countries. Indians are more sentimental than others.¹⁹ That will be maintained only with educated people."^{*}

The notion that there are educated ways of behaving and speaking can be found in other research. For example, Roger and Patricia Jeffery and Craig Jeffrey (2004b; 2008: 65-72) have written

¹⁹ 'Sentimental' was generally used by informants to mean greater love and affection, especially for family members.

about the value given to education as a form of cultural distinction. The educated young men they spoke to in rural Uttar Pradesh constructed schooling as a source of individual dignity and masculine prowess rooted in notions of the distinctiveness and superiority of educated consumption, dress, speech and bodily demeanour (see also Jeffrey 2010: 89). Across India, language is a primary means through which people assert an educated identity and thereby claim respect. The importance of language as a status signal in Hyderabad was not only directly stated by informants but was also evident in the adoption of a self-consciously ‘elevated’ style (Bourdieu 1991: 152) by some informants. Riversdale parents and teachers had a habit of using acronyms extensively and adding suffixes to words – improvise instead of improve, compromization instead of compromise. This is a means by which the upper middle-class distinguish their language from that of those below them. As Bourdieu (1991: 66) argues, “Utterances are not only (save in exceptional circumstances) signs to be understood and deciphered; they are also *signs of wealth* intended to be evaluated and appreciated, and *signs of authority*, intended to be believed and obeyed.” All middle-class people in Hyderabad recognize that English fluency “can function as linguistic capital, producing a *profit of distinction*” (Bourdieu 1991: 55), and that the unequal distribution of linguistic capital is in large part a product of differences in formal schooling.

The final consequence of education was described only by Riversdale parents and I contend represents an attempt by members of the upper middle-class to distinguish their form of knowledge or understanding from those who have merely attained the minimum level or type of education necessary for respectability. Many Riversdale parents focused in their discussions of the benefits of education on self-confidence and a broader understanding of the world sometimes described as ‘exposure’:

Educated person I think he is a little more mature, worldly wise and a little more broad-minded. For example, my maid – this girl her mother also works for me sometimes and she was not keeping well and they were trying to think what was the reason. She is falling sick every 15 days before new moon day and full moon day so they are thinking it must be witchcraft. So whatever education I have I was thinking in a different way. I asked what the symptoms were. She said she is tired and dizzy. I thought maybe she is having malnutrition or low BP or menopause or thyroid problems. I was thinking based on symptoms, but those people are in their world and don’t want to listen to us. This is a good example of broad mindedness and backwardness* (Upper middle-class Riversdale mother).

Education basically gives you a lot of exposure – what is happening in the world, how you can improve yourself and society* (Upper middle-class Riversdale father).

These parents were looking not just for the ability to speak and behave ‘properly,’ but for signs of rationalism and an awareness of the wider world. They were concerned with a particular *kind* of education. This was also evident in their choice of school.

Riversdale and St Catherine's

In India the education system is structured as follows: there are officially four years of primary school (Classes I to IV), an additional three years of Upper Primary (Classes V to VII) and three years of High School (Classes VIII to X), but all of these classes are generally lumped together in a single institution which often draws different lines between senior and junior classes. Most schools also have two pre-primary years known as Lower Kindergarten (LKG) and Upper Kindergarten (UKG) or Pre-primary one and two (PP1 and PP2). Two years of 'Higher Secondary', typically in a separate 'Junior' or 'Intermediate' College (Classes XI and XII, most commonly referred to as 'inter') follow Tenth Class. At this stage students choose between a range of subject combinations which determine which path of tertiary study can be followed, such as BiPC (Biology, Physics, Chemistry) for those wanting to become doctors, and MPC (Maths, Physics, Chemistry) for those wanting to pursue engineering. Undergraduate educational institutions are generally referred to as 'colleges' with the term 'university' reserved for postgraduate institutions (the two are often separate). There are three main types of school in India: government schools, private unaided schools, and private aided schools. Within these three categories there is a broad range of schools including low-cost private schools, elite 'international' schools, Kendriya Vidyalayas (central government schools for children of government employees), and *Madrasas* (Islamic schools).

Education in India falls under the control of both the central government and the states. The curriculum is devised by education councils; either the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) or one of the various State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs). The curriculum of the former is followed in Central schools or Kendriya Viyalayas, or those affiliated with the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). The curricula of the latter are followed by schools affiliated with the board of an individual state. The board with which schools are affiliated – CBSE or state – determines which syllabus is followed and which examinations are sat at the end of Class X and Class XII. The school year runs from June until April, with examinations conducted in March and early April. Most schools in Hyderabad are either English-medium or Telugu-medium (there are also some Urdu-medium schools). Only schools following the state syllabus are Telugu-medium and these tend to be government schools or extremely low-cost private schools.

Riversdale and St Catherine's are private unaided English-medium schools and until very recently both had classes from LKG/PP1 (age 3.5 years on 1 June) to 10th (14.5 years on 1 June). In 2010 Riversdale extended its teaching to include 11th and 12th class. When I started my research, Riversdale had 1812 students and 125 teachers. It follows the CBSE syllabus and has adopted International Baccalaureate (IB) methodologies in the pre-primary, primary and junior wings. The school is located in two multi-storey buildings situated in generous grounds that include a swimming pool, a large grassed field for sports and tennis and basketball courts. For the 2011-2012 school year,

tuition fees for senior classes are Rs 8,200 per term (Rs 24, 600 per year). The school charges an annual fee of Rs 7,000 and an additional one-off fee of Rs 10,000 is paid when a child is first enrolled. Most children travel to school on a school bus for which Riversdale charges Rs 2,950 to Rs 4,650 per term depending on the distance between the school and the child's home.

During fieldwork, St Catherine's had about 1,000 students and 50 teachers. It follows the state-run Secondary School Certificate (SSC) syllabus. The school premises consist of a single multi-storey building and a small sandy outdoor area where assemblies and games are held. During the year of fieldwork, the building was extended and the new rooms were used for a 'Techno School' in which audiovisual technology was used to aid teaching. The same teachers taught at the Techno School and the High School so the only observable difference between the two was the audiovisual equipment (used occasionally), slightly different tables and chairs and fewer students per class. The Principal estimates that the total cost of attending the High School (including fees, uniforms, textbooks and other stationery) ranges from Rs 800 to Rs 1,200 per month (Rs 9,600 to Rs 14,400 per year) per child. With St Catherine's school fees equivalent to roughly 10 per cent of the average family income, many parents struggled to pay. School fees were in fact a major motivation for limiting family size with many parents telling me that they could not afford to have more than one or two children due to the expense of education.²⁰

Riversdale and St Catherine's provide very different styles of education. Riversdale prides itself in focusing on 'concept' rather than 'content'. Staff and students criticize 'traditional' or 'normal' schools which they say evaluate students in terms of marks alone and where learning involves 'by hearting' or 'mugging up' answers from textbooks:

SSC is focused only on academics ... rugging, mugging, answer 600 questions. If you study them thoroughly you'll get 90 per cent. Here it's not like that. In CBSE you have to study the whole lesson and you don't know what questions will be asked ... The kind of exposure they get within a subject or a language is far better than state [syllabus]. I have seen the people who are from SSC schools struggling to become part of this global world. It's going to be very tough* (Upper middle-class Riversdale father).

According to the Riversdale community, this 'traditional' system of teaching places undue pressure on students who acquire no useful knowledge. Staff have reduced their reliance on textbooks and have welcomed the recent changes in the CBSE curriculum which aim to phase out exams. In addition to the academic curriculum the school expends a lot of time and effort on extra- and co- curricular activities. Along with sports and games, students participate in theatre performances, go on regular field trips and interact with the guests, such as authors, corporate coaches and classical dancers, who visit the school. The school has an explicit programme of values education, much of which is based on the best selling self-help book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey 1989). Through daily

²⁰ Riversdale parents also talked about expensive education making small families necessary, but few parents spent as large a percentage of their income on schooling as St Catherine's parents did and they also had the option of sending their children to less expensive private schools.

discussion of personal development and positive character traits, Riversdale aims, according to teachers and parents, to shape students into 'good human beings' and 'good citizens'.

The Riversdale school day begins at 8.30am and ends at 3.30pm. At this time students go home, spend a small amount of time doing homework and then pass the rest of the day as they wish. They are actively discouraged from attending extra tutorials, although some with weaknesses in a particular subject do so. A very small number of students are also involved in coaching sessions for admission to prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) after school and/or on weekends, but this was always talked about somewhat apologetically as it was clearly in conflict with the ethos of the school. Parents are told not to judge their children based on their marks and are encouraged, along with students, to think beyond the conventional paths of IITs, IIMs (Indian Institutes of Management), medicine and engineering. In general students and parents seem far less concerned about academic performance than their counterparts at St Catherine's.

Rather than marks, Riversdale parents and teachers talk about the importance of 'communication skills,' by which they mean English language fluency and the ability to talk to others with confidence. They value Riversdale's ability to provide their children with the kind of 'linguistic capital' valued in the middle-class 'linguistic market' (Bourdieu 1991). Riversdale parents and teachers spoke also of the importance of 'exposure', a term defined by Fuller and Narasimham as "the process of enhancing social skills and cultural knowledge through new opportunities, experiences, social contacts and sources of information, as well as the enhanced state that ensues" (2006a: 260). For Riversdale teachers, students and parents, the communication skills and 'confidence' acquired through 'exposure' are a better path to a comfortable middle-class future than marks and mugging up:

[Riversdale] is a good school because it focuses on the all-round development of the child. It gives students many opportunities and chances to show their talents and to develop them. Students get exposure and awareness of worldly things* (Upper middle-class female Riversdale teacher).

It is a pre-conception that schools are for academics only. But I think it's also about the exposure you give to the world and giving them communication skills, also grooming the whole person and providing good citizens for the future so they can lead a better world than the present ... We keep a lot of emphasis on communication and exposure and I think this does make a big difference when students apply for colleges and jobs. Maybe not for educational institutions, but when it comes to jobs these are the ones who are going to be selected. It's changing. Earlier it was based on marks but now it's changing. Our students might get 5 per cent less than students in other schools but they gain much more in values and communication skills* (Upper middle-class female Riversdale teacher).

The importance attached to 'exposure' is also reflected in hiring practices. The principal explained how she selects teachers:

When the résumé comes I see the exposure of the teacher. Let's say the teacher belongs to Hyderabad and has never gone out of Hyderabad. Which institution, which college? Because I know all the colleges in the city. Which college can give what kind of exposure, I know that. And then their experience. Which schools have they worked in? There are conservative

schools over here and there are very outdated schools over here. And if they have worked there I would not call them at all. It takes a long time for me to make them unlearn their conventional methods and relearn the approach we have in our school. So I would see their exposure to better places, bigger places, bigger worlds. I would also see where their husband is, I mean spouse is working. That also makes a difference and how widely travelled are they are.

Many Riversdale parents also expressed the opinion that a 'good school' should have teachers with 'communication skills', by which they meant fluency in English. As a result of the value placed on 'exposure' and 'communication skills' the teachers at Riversdale are mostly upper middle-class. Because teachers' salaries are too low for much beyond lower middle-class status, this means that the vast majority of teachers at this school are female and have husbands with higher-paying jobs, in contrast to St Catherine's where teachers are low to middle middle-class and many more are male.

In addition to being critical of 'normal' schools, the principal and many teachers at Riversdale are critical of the two most popular chains of junior colleges in Hyderabad, Sri Chaitanya and Narayana. These junior colleges are widely regarded as the best junior colleges in the city for maths and science and most middle-class people expect those students who do well in their Tenth Class exams to attend these colleges. However, the principal strongly discourages students from this well-worn path: "I think they're factories. They are good in producing assembly line products. I think they kill the creative thinking in the students. They do more damage than good." Although many Riversdale students attend these Junior Colleges, this was talked about critically by others and defensively by these students and their parents (no other choice, the best option for maths and science, etc).

St Catherine's is in many ways exactly the kind of 'traditional' or 'normal' school criticized by Riversdale staff and students. The official school hours are from 8.45am until 4pm, Monday to Saturday, but all students from 6th class onwards stay at school until 6pm for additional study hours. Most students also attend tutorials before and/or after school and/or on Sundays. Classes involve brief explanations of textbook material and, mostly, students reading from their textbooks in an effort to learn material by heart. Exams are held monthly. When I asked the principal why so much teaching time was used for assessment, he told me students do not open their books outside of school hours unless exams are imminent. He insisted that students should be studying after returning home at 6 p.m. Students were primarily concerned with getting good marks in exams and parents complained to the school when their children did not get the high marks expected. Marks are a central topic of concern and discussion as they are seen as the only way to a comfortable middle-class future. Science and maths are given significantly more importance than any other subjects as they are seen as a path to a future career as a doctor or engineer. Parents, teachers and students assume that any student who gets sufficient marks for entry to Sri Chaitanya or Narayana will attend these Junior Colleges.

Many teachers at St Catherine's are critical of the lack of understanding students gain from such a system, the overemphasis on marks, and the idea that the performance of a teacher should be

evaluated in terms of the marks of her students. Like Riversdale teachers they asserted that schools should focus on the 'all-round development of the student'. However, they feel powerless to change the system. Although the principal faces significant criticism for devoting so much time to exams that there is insufficient time for teaching, teachers tend to view uneducated parents as the source of the problem. According to St Catherine's teachers, these parents are unable to supervise their children's education making exams necessary to force student accountability. Marks were also seen as the only way for uneducated parents to measure the progress of their children, again creating the need for frequent exams. As the principal's key method of convincing parents that his school is doing a good job of educating their children is exam marks, his key criterion for assessing teacher performance has to be the marks of their students. This encourages teachers to prepare students very directly for exams and to give students more marks than they have truly earned. With parents investing such significant portions of their income in their children's schooling and with schooling increasingly seen as a commodity that leads to jobs rather than a process for acquiring useful knowledge, parents are particularly unhappy if a child fails and they are forced to pay for another year of schooling. This means that students frequently move on to the next year of school despite being inadequately prepared.

The problem of rote learning is not a result of teachers who think it is the best method, but of language and examination style. Most Tenth Class students do not have the English language skills to understand the passages they read as part of their English syllabus. The class difference between the two schools is also a linguistic one. Although Riversdale students usually speak in their mother-tongues at home and with their peers (even in school), almost all had at least one parent fluent in English and most new entrants came to school with some knowledge of English. With the exception of Hindi and Telugu language teachers, all Riversdale teachers were fluent in English and by Tenth Class students were sufficiently fluent to be reading the Harry Potter and Twilight books along with Dan Brown novels and self-help books in their leisure time. The parents of St Catherine's students do not generally speak English and teachers speak just well enough to facilitate students' rote learning of textbook and workbook material. As exactly the same questions appear in the exams as are in student workbooks, students simply learn the answers provided in their workbooks by heart. There are pervasive rumours that examiners will only accept answers that reproduce word for word the answers provided in workbooks. Although this problem could in part be addressed by better English language teaching in earlier years, the prior availability of exam questions and answers will always make rote learning tempting.

It did not appear to be the case, however, that St Catherine's teachers and parents would be happy with a Riversdale education if it was suddenly made available to them. Despite critiques of students' lack of genuine understanding, teachers at St Catherine's saw high marks in competitive exams as the only way to get a place in a reputable institution and ultimately a good job. I do not think they would have been comfortable with the lack of importance given to marks at Riversdale

and the significant amounts of time spent on non-syllabus related activities. Different criteria for assessing a good education were clearly in operation in Hyderabad. Two quite distinct educational paths are emerging, one which focuses on marks and mugging up and another which focuses on understanding in academics and the exposure and experience students gain from extra-curricular activities. These differences represent a new development in upper middle-class efforts to distinguish their 'knowledge and understanding' from that of the lower classes.

The Rise of International Schools in Hyderabad

In the last two decades there has been a dramatic rise in private (unaided) schools in India, due to the poor quality of education provided in government schools. Private schooling is particularly common in urban areas (Kingdon 2007: 183-86). According to official figures for 2000-2001 reported by Tooley and Dixon (2003: 9), in the Hyderabad District private unaided schools constituted 46 per cent of total schools, employed three times as many teachers as were employed in the government sector and catered for 61 per cent of total students. As many private schools are not recognized by the government, it is probable that these figures underestimate the significance of the privatization phenomenon.²¹ People I spoke to in Hyderabad were adamant that anyone who could afford to, i.e., anyone above the poverty line, would enrol their children in a private school. Students at St Catherine's told me that although their parents struggled to pay their fees, they would never go to a government school because they are from respectable families and thus should attend a respectable school.

As the poor and lower-middle class have moved from government to low-cost private schools, the upper middle class have also sought new strategies for educating their children. Until very recently, the Indian school market consisted of ordinary government schools that catered predominantly for the very poor and followed state syllabi, schools for government employees that followed central syllabi, private schools that generally followed the state syllabus and catered for the middle classes, and exclusive boarding schools (the most famous example being the Doon School) following central or international syllabi and catering for the elite. The most recent change in Indian schooling has been the emergence of a new type of school focused on the 'all-round development of the child'. These schools offer middle-class families a more up-market alternative to standard private schools with expensive facilities, extra-curricular activities and concept based teaching (rather than rote learning) as their main selling points. The development of such schools, commonly described as 'international' was, however, preceded by the emergence of 'corporate' schools.

The educational environment in suburban Hyderabad (and across India) is pervaded by a sense of intense competition. 'Board' exams are sat at the end of tenth class and twelfth class and the marks

²¹ For a fairly positive evaluation of the privatization of Indian schooling see Venkatanarayana (2004), the Probe Team report (1999), and Tooley and Dixon (2003; 2006). For a more critical evaluation see Patricia Jeffery (2005: 20), and Roger Jeffery, Patricia Jeffery and Craig Jeffrey (2005).

achieved in these exams determine entry and fee levels for junior college and college respectively. Students' marks in six subjects are added together to give a single number that stands as a marker of achievement and ability for years to come. An upper middle-class Riversdale mother told me, "This is my girl's Tenth [Class] so this is a turning point for her. These marks are going to be valid throughout her life. That Tenth certificate has tremendous value wherever she goes.* High youth suicide rates in India were often explained to me in terms of the extreme levels of stress this competition generated.

'Corporate' schools are chains of schools run by organizations that have built a reputation for high board exam marks achieved through long hours of repetitive rote learning. They are clear products of 'diploma disease'. According to Ronald Dore (1976) educated unemployment and competition between employers to attract the most highly qualified employees, leads to a rise over time in the level of qualification required for any particular job. This results in schooling aimed at the acquisition of qualifications necessary to *get* jobs, as opposed to learning for 'its own sake' (for self-fulfilment, for personal development, etc) or learning to *do* jobs. These tendencies are exacerbated in developing countries because of greater scarcity of jobs, greater income differentials, and a lack of resources for styles of education that do not involve ritualistic exam-centred rote-memorising. All of these factors combine in Hyderabad to create the impression that the strictly exam-centred education in corporate schools is the first step in the path to attaining a good job.

Today it is unclear what separates 'corporate' schools from other SSC schools as long hours and exclusive focus on exam preparation (i.e., no sports or cultural activities and no non-examinable learning) are widespread. The label 'corporate' was occasionally used to refer to all SSC schools with this educational style, but was usually reserved for schools with a large number of branches across the city that are able to charge higher fees because of their reputation for high marks. The 'textbook' culture of such schools, which focuses on rote learning rather than comprehension, has come under frequent attack in the literature on education in India (Kumar 2005), and the 'craze' for 'international' schools that has emerged in Hyderabad represents an emphatic rejection of this textbook culture.

Until ten years ago, upper middle-class parents in Hyderabad had very limited choices for the education of their children. They could not afford elite residential schools, and the demand for places in the small number of reputable CBSE schools in the city far exceeded supply. Many upper middle class families had to settle for corporate SSC schools where their children would be judged purely on their academic performance along with the lower sectors of the middle classes. In 2001 the first school to brand itself as 'international', Oakridge International School, opened in the city. According to the Director of Riversdale who was involved in the establishment of Oakridge, of the original 250 students in the school, 150 were the children of software engineers and who had been abroad and had returned to India. The remaining children came from a fairly even mix of business and professional families. The professionals were attracted by the teaching methodologies, the businessmen by the air conditioning and other facilities and the status of having a child in such a

school. The director of Riversdale believes this ratio continues today with about half of the parents being concerned with the teaching and the other half concerned primarily with status.

The movement towards new teaching methodologies was not entirely new, but had been previously reserved for elite schools or the very small number of CBSE schools to which only a small percentage of Hyderabad's middle classes could gain entry. What has been so distinctive about the schooling market in Hyderabad since the establishment of Oakridge has been the dramatic rise in the number of schools that brand themselves as international or at least try to distinguish themselves from more run-of-the-mill state syllabus schools with their large campuses, expensive infrastructure, claims of innovative teaching methodologies and exclusive fees. Oakridge now has two branches in the city, and a handful of new schools of this ilk appear every year. On the five kilometre stretch from Miyapur to Riversdale, there are two 'global' schools, a 'planet' school and a 'concept' school. Although it remains difficult to get a place in some of these schools, the large number of schools means there is a place somewhere for any child whose parents are willing to pay. Oakridge remains the leader in the field charging fees between Rs 150,000 and Rs 250,000 per year.

As the number of 'international' schools in Hyderabad continues to rise, it remains unclear what the label 'international' means to local people. Criteria mentioned by informants included: following the CBSE syllabus; following 'international' syllabi such as International Baccalaureate and IGCSE; 'international standards' in teaching involving practical or applied knowledge, project work and the teaching of communication skills and other soft skills; sports and other extra-curricular activities; a highly educated faculty; better facilities; and air-conditioned rooms and buses. The general perception appeared to be that, with the benefit of significantly more money and a greater openness to innovation, these schools were able to provide better education.

Although Riversdale may seem like a good candidate for this label, it does not claim to be international and its senior members are very critical of international schools:

They just have the name and it has got nothing to do with any international curriculum and most of them talk about big building, fancy building, air-conditioned comfort, and that is an international school they mean to say by that. Having Cambridge, IGCSE, is an international school [as] we consider it (Riversdale principal).

The school website tells us that by 2007 Riversdale was "emerging as a good school." By this they are referring to fact that the school had had a change of management in 2005, was now run by someone who had been involved with Oakridge, and was in the process of transforming from a fairly ordinary SSC school, albeit one with very large grounds, to a CBSE/IB school employing innovative teaching methods. The website assures us that Riversdale "didn't need an 'international brand'" to promote itself at this time. We are told that the school management were concerned about "the belief in the society that international schools are for the privileged children whose parents are globe trotters and for whom future education is tied up in foreign universities". Riversdale is apparently not in the same league as these international schools "with fancy infrastructure, conditioned environment and high

fee structure”. However, the vast majority of Riversdale teachers and most parents interviewed said that Riversdale is an international school according to their criteria (described above).

The explanation for the contradiction between Riversdale management’s desire to distance themselves from the international label and the opinion expressed by many that it is an international school lies in the tension between the common assumption that ‘international’ schools are better than ‘normal’ schools and the widespread belief that international schools involve extravagance that has no impact on the quality of education. Several informants made a distinction between schools that brand themselves as international both in name and in terms of air-conditioning and other facilities, and schools that are genuinely international in terms of education. Air-conditioning was mentioned again and again, particularly air-conditioned buses, as a symbol of material indulgence and educational irrelevance. Many told me that few or no schools in Hyderabad could accurately be called international as they are driven by the desire to display wealth rather than to achieve international standards in education:

Whatever schools I am observing in my area, these schools I doubt if they are giving international standards ... If you put ‘international school’ [in the title of the school] ... you can collect four times or five times or maybe ten times of fees what the remaining schools are charging (St Catherine’s principal).

International is only a word that people have come out with to sell the school and we are not here for selling. We are here for imparting education and I think that we are trying to give that to the children. By giving the word international I think we would be just deceiving the parents. By saying we’re international and having AC rooms where actually what would be not given is education part of it. So if an AC or an AC bus or an AC room would call your school international then definitely we are not international (Principal of another upper middle-class school).

There is no ideal international school in Hyderabad. They are all completely driven by the status of the parents* (Upper middle-class Riversdale father).

These attitudes are in many ways comparable to criticisms of excessive consumption described in the previous chapter – the extravagance of international schools was, like extravagance in other areas of consumption, thought to be wasteful, to show concern for status rather than quality and thus to exceed the limits of middle-class propriety. Principals and management from schools that do label themselves as international point to their international curricula and methodologies and their NRI students as justification. They are aware of the criticism of international schools, but assert that they do offer better education and that luxuries like air-conditioning provide a more comfortable learning environment that is comparable to students’ homes and parents’ workplaces.

The ‘international’ label is clearly not a very accurate one. Although some upper-middle-class schools explicitly brand themselves as international, global, planet or world schools, many do not despite the fact that they share many of the same characteristics and would be lumped in the same category by most people. Although it is always tempting to use the local terminology, the pervasive anti-international school discourse that exists in Hyderabad makes this difficult. Many schools that

are clearly part of the same broad category are extremely critical of the international label. What unites them is a focus on knowledge and behaviours than cannot be learnt from a textbook. Whether they identify as ‘international’ or not, these schools play an important role in practices of class distinction that enable the upper middle class to assert the legitimacy of their knowledge over that of the lower middle class and poor. Accordingly, I refer to such schools as ‘exposure’ schools.

‘Exposure’ and Social Reproduction

... all the criteria of assessment favourable to the children of the petite bourgeoisie ... are contested in the name of such ‘values’ as ‘energy’, ‘courage’, ‘will’, the virtues of the leader ... and, perhaps especially, (personal) initiative, baptized ‘self-help’ or ‘enterprise’... To put ‘education’ before ‘instruction’, ‘character’ before ‘intellect’, sport before culture is to assert, within the scholastic world itself, the existence of a hierarchy irreducible to the specifically academic hierarchy which privileges the second term in each of these oppositions (Bourdieu 1984: 93).

AG: What do you think is the most important thing that Riversdale teaches?

Riversdale Principal: Character and competency. I mean it in that order - character and competency.

The sociology of education was dominated in the 1950s by a ‘modernization’ or “school-to-the-rescue” (Stambach 2000: 11) approach that assumed schools played an unproblematic role in meritocratic social mobility (Levinson & Holland 1996: 4). By the 1970s, however, disillusionment with the possibility that education could unproblematically resolve issues of inequality and underdevelopment led to the emergence of more critical approaches. Schooling “lost its innocence” and attention turned to the “hidden curriculum” (Luykx 1998: xxxiii) as it was realized that schools in many ways serve to *reproduce* social inequalities to meet the demands of capitalist production and the nation-state (Levinson & Holland 1996: 5). Although development discourse continues to present education as a means to improve the position of previously disadvantaged groups (e.g., Sen 2000), researchers in South Asia and elsewhere increasingly view education as a ‘contradictory resource’ (Jeffrey et al. 2008; 2004a). Following Bourdieu (1990) and Willis (1977) I argue that school education in Hyderabad serves to reproduce class relations, but my focus is on differences between schools rather than within them.

In the highly privatized Indian education market it is obvious that schools do not represent a level playing field. With government schools only attended by the poorest of the poor, children’s ability to access the kind of education likely to yield good exam results and, ultimately, jobs is dependent on their parents’ ability to pay. Different definitions of a ‘good’ education make it more difficult to argue that the contrast between ‘exposure’ and ‘normal’ schools is a story of more money buys better education. A few St Catherine’s parents send their children to the school despite being able to afford ‘exposure’ school fees. The principal of St Catherine’s says that wealthy parents send their children to ‘international’ schools because the facilities are better and because “they want to

show off, show to the public, to their colleagues, to their friends, that we are sending our children to international schools”. According to him, some wealthy parents who have not been affected by this ‘craze’ choose to send their children to ‘normal’ schools like his, recognising that such schools are ‘nearer to reality’. Furthermore, when Riversdale changed from SSC to CBSE and IB and adopted new teaching methodologies, some parents withdrew their children from the school and some of those who did not still feel that the school gives inadequate attention to academics. These parents remain unsure as to whether ‘international’ school children are better equipped for higher education and the job market than those who have been educated in the ‘traditional’ system. Exploration of why exposure schools have been so successful and why these two types of school define a good education differently demonstrates that it is class that in many ways shapes people’s ‘taste’ (Bourdieu 1984) for education and their educational choices in turn reproduce their class positions.

Although international schools have been heavily criticised, the rapid proliferation and expansion of such schools leaves no doubt that the ‘exposure school’ genre has been very successful. Aggressive marketing is partly responsible, but there are a number of other factors that have, over the past two decades, contributed to the demand for ‘exposure’ schools:

1. returning NRIs reluctant to expose their American-born children to the pressures of rote learning;
2. a growing middle-class population;
3. increasing affluence in the middle classes;
4. a changing job market;
5. an increasingly educated population.

It is not immediately apparent why increasing numbers of increasingly affluent middle-class Hyderabadis needed new schools. The answer lies in part in the fact that this growing population of affluent parents were sufficiently financially secure to be confident that their children would succeed in life even if they were not ‘toppers’. In addition, while many of these middle-class parents had distinguished themselves from their lower-class peers simply by attending school and university, their children need to attend different *kinds* of schools to distinguish themselves from their lower-class peers who are also attending schools and universities. The legitimacy of this new style of education has been reinforced by the changing demands of the job market.

Until the 1990s, the most sought after jobs in Hyderabad were government jobs. To get a government job one had to do well in a competitive exam. It was also useful to know the right people and these connections were usually most easily available to upper-caste Hindus. According to informants, reservations have made it increasingly difficult for upper-caste Hindus to secure government jobs and, following the liberalization of the Indian economy, working for an MNC (Multinational Corporation) has come to be perceived as the most rewarding both financially and in terms of prestige. These jobs call for a different skill set in several ways, most obviously in the need for English in order to communicate with out-of-state and international clients and colleagues. In addition, jobs in MNCs are secured through interviews in which the ‘whole person’ is evaluated. An

applicant can no longer rely on examinable ‘facts’ and must instead display their competence through communications skills and deportment indicative of ‘exposure’.

As mentioned above, my upper middle-class informants are simply the latest in a long stream of Andhra Pradesh’s rural elite attempting to convert their economic capital into the cultural capital (including educational capital) needed to legitimize their position in urban middle-class life. For this generation, however, a ‘normal’ education is an insufficient form of legitimization, thus the focus on ‘exposure’, a reified and commodified form of cultural capital. Many of the ‘exposure’ schools in Hyderabad are headed by members of the more established upper middle classes who have recognized the marketability of their greater fluency in English and their ‘confident’ self-presentation. ‘Exposure’ schools offer newly middle class parents the opportunity to convert their economic capital into the form of cultural capital currently most valued by the urban middle classes and by employers and thus purchase more class legitimacy for their children. That this is a fairly deliberate process of non-curricular education will be seen in the discussion in the next section of Riversdale’s attempts to educate its students and parents in a range of non-curricular matters.

The importance of exposure for securing new economy jobs was evident in the comments of employers I spoke to. They talked at length about the uselessness of a ‘topper’ unable to apply his or her knowledge and the usefulness of the good communicator who perhaps did not do so well in his or her exams. For example, the director of a small software company told me that “Getting a job depends on what *type* of education you had.”* He had interviewed a ‘distinction student’ for a job on the day of our interview, but had not hired him because “He is not meeting expectations. Awareness and experience, confidence, attitude and aptitude are very low.”*

Recent research on educated unemployment in India also suggests that ‘exposure’ is important. Patricia Jeffery, Roger Jeffery and Craig Jeffrey (2005: 2095) report that in Uttar Pradesh Chamars (Dalits) were disadvantaged when attempting to secure jobs by their “relative exclusion from prestigious schools, higher caste Hindu social networks, and *appropriate urban cultural capital*” (my emphasis; see also Jeffrey 2010: 85). Fuller and Narasimhan (2006a) found that the failure of the majority of graduates from engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu to secure jobs in top software companies was explained in terms of a lack of the ‘communication skills’ that are acquired through ‘exposure.’ In fact, Fuller and Narasimham identify the importance placed on ‘exposure’ for securing employment as the source of a growing sense among the urban middle classes that school should be about more than academic success; it should provide a broader education that gives students a variety of experiences.

St Catherine’s parents are not entirely misguided in their perception of good examination marks as the surest way to a good future. While there can be no doubt that fluency in English and embodiment of an upper middle-class habitus are assets when interviewing for jobs, seats in Junior College, College (undergraduate) and University (postgraduate) are given on the basis of marks. Fees are lowest for those with the highest marks and highest for those with the worst marks. Those who

do not get good enough marks for the ‘merit’ seats have to literally bid for a small number of ‘management’ seats that are not allocated on the basis of marks. Riversdale parents are clearly in a better position to pay for seats than St Catherine’s parents. One Riversdale father had paid Rs 600,000 for a mechanical engineering seat for his elder son in a good university.

Riversdale students also had the option of doing their two years of ‘Higher Secondary’ in ‘exposure’ schools (which are increasingly extending their classes to Eleventh and Twelfth as Riversdale did in 2010) where fees rather than marks are the key entrance criteria, something that was not possible for the vast majority of St Catherine’s students. A further consideration is the fact that, as Toril Moi has observed of class capital generally, “If persons from disadvantaged social groups require all the educational capital they can obtain if they are going to advance in society, members of more favoured classes can get further on less educational capital, simply because they have access to large amounts of other kinds of capital” (1991: 1024). Hyderabad’s lower middle-class parents who invest in marks are in a sense investing in the form of educational capital they believe most likely to provide good returns, whereas upper middle-class children can rely on other forms of capital not only to get into higher education institutions, but also for their success in life beyond education.

Riversdale students do not really sacrifice marks for ‘exposure’, however. Riversdale phased out the SSC syllabus gradually and 2010 was the last year in which some tenth class students sat SSC exams. Although there is a widespread belief among lower middle-class people that ‘international’ schools are able to spend less time on academics because they follow the supposedly much easier CBSE syllabus, the marks from Riversdale SSC students compare very favourably with those of St Catherine’s students.

OVERALL %	RIVERSDALE		ST CATHERINE'S	
	N	%	N	%
90-100	6	21.4	4	12.5
80-89	14	50	8	25
70-79	5	17.9	9	28.1
60-69	2	7.1	7	21.9
50-59	1	3.6	1	3.1
<50	0	0	3	9.4
	28	100	32	100

TABLE 7: Riversdale (2010) and St Catherine's (2009) SSC Tenth Class Marks

As Table 7 shows, although a number of St Catherine’s students do well, many more students (34.4 per cent) at St Catherine’s receive marks below 70 per cent than at Riversdale (10.7 per cent). In an educational environment where full marks are not unheard of and a mark is not considered particularly good unless it is in the nineties, Riversdale marks are not outstanding, but they are certainly more consistently good than St Catherine’s marks.

Lower middle-class parents' investment in marks is not simply a pragmatic decision. It also reflects the extent to which they are less aware of trends in education and employment opportunities. As Bourdieu (1984: 142-43) argues,

One of the most valuable sorts of information constituting inherited cultural capital is practical or theoretical knowledge of the fluctuations of the market in academic qualifications, the sense of investment which enables one to get the best return on inherited cultural capital in the scholastic market or on scholastic capital in the labour market ... Newcomers to secondary education are led, by the mere fact of having access to it, to expect it to give them what it gave others at a time when they themselves were excluded from it.

What of those upper middle-class parents who reject the 'exposure' school model either by enrolling their children at St Catherine's or by criticising the non-curricular activities at Riversdale? The number of upper middle-class St Catherine's parents is in fact very small – probably not more than ten families – most of whom have successful businesses which they expect their children to take over. As they themselves have been successful without much education, they are, according to St Catherine's teachers, not particularly concerned about the quality of their children's education. The one set of non-business upper middle-class parents with children at St Catherine's whom I knew of had in fact already moved their eldest child to a more upmarket school that could be categorized as 'exposure' and were planning to move their younger child as soon as they thought he was old enough to travel to a better school. The Riversdale parents who criticized the school or withdrew their children are perhaps less in touch with trends in the education and employment market and less able to pay for seats should their children fail to gain merit-based entrance to colleges. While they do not have to worry that their children might fail at a school like Riversdale, they might question the precise balance between academic and extra-curricular and might argue that more time spent memorizing lessons will bring their children closer to full marks.

There can be no doubt that the focus on 'exposure' serves to reproduce existing class hierarchies, particularly as "those who best understand the importance of social and cultural capital for career success are precisely the middle class people who already possess it" (Fuller & Narasimhan 2006a: 262). Even if the lower-middle-class families I spoke to had been more aware of the need for social and cultural capital they could not afford the style of education that would involve more time away from explicitly academic work. Their taste for rote learning is a taste of necessity. Upper middle-class families could afford to buy seats if children's marks were not good enough. For them the difference between 90 and 95 per cent was of far less concern. Free from the pressure to compete purely on the basis of marks, their taste for exposure is a taste of liberty. It is Riversdale parents' distance from necessity that enables them to value quality of knowledge over quantity and form over function (Bourdieu 1984).

Local School; Global Values?

Several months into my fieldwork, hoardings appeared on roadsides around Miyapur for a new school that claimed to provide ‘modern education’ and ‘traditional values’. At first I was delighted, thinking I would finally find out what a modern education and traditional values are believed to be in middle-class Hyderabad and what middle-class Hyderabadis feel about such things being provided by a school. But when I spoke to Riversdale and St Catherine’s teachers and parents about the hoardings they did not share my enthusiasm. Most people dismissed the slogan as meaningless advertising and told me that it was nothing new. They did not believe that this school would be particularly different from other schools with similar fee structures. Many pointed out that such slogans were already in existence, giving the example of ‘global standards; local values’ used by another local middle to upper middle-class school.



FIGURE 7: Modern Education, Traditional Values

I interviewed the principal of the school responsible for the hoardings and asked what had been intended by the school slogan. She told me:

In this age of technology where children do need to be abreast of the latest in technology, we shouldn't forget the roots, that is, our traditional values. Somehow in this age where parents are caught up in their mundane responsibilities and materialistic responsibilities, where they do have to sustain the family in a commercial and competitive world, some of the traditional values have been forgotten.

She talked about respect for elders, which had been forgotten as a result of the decline of the joint family, and celebration of rituals as examples of traditional values taught in the school. Riversdale and St Catherine's parents and teachers generally said that 'modern education' referred to the use of technology in teaching, but some stated that all contemporary education is modern as the subject matter taught is constantly being updated. People seemed to see 'traditional values' as self-explanatory and I was frequently told that it simply means 'Indian traditions'. When asked them to elaborate, interviewees revealed that 'traditions' are (Hindu) festivals, the epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata, and respect for parents and other family members. One Riversdale father talked about helping parents as an example of traditional values. He told me proudly that his son would never allow him to take his own plate to the kitchen, but a colleague whose son who goes to Oakridge not only takes his own plate to the kitchen but also his son's. Another Riversdale father told me that if his daughter had been in her first, rather than her last, year of school and if he believed that they would provide what was promised in their advertising he would enrol his child immediately. He was very concerned about the loss of traditional values, particularly respect for elders and thought that Riversdale could give more importance to festivals. However, other parents felt that school was not the place for traditional values: "What I personally feel is the tradition has to come from the family. I don't want my kid to learn how a traditional item is being cooked, how we dress on a traditional day. It's all being taught at home. I send my kids to school for a different purpose."

Although informants' responses to the advertising were meant to be dismissive, this dismissiveness suggested that the Academic Heights advertising had tapped into a trope so pervasive that it was taken for granted – the desire to be able to compete on a global stage without losing what was believed to be distinctive about Indian culture. My excitement about the Academic Heights advertising was in large part due to the fact that the words modern and traditional had not been used in relation to schooling during my fieldwork and I had been reluctant to introduce such terminology myself. In their responses to my questions people equated modernity not just with the contemporary and with technology but also with a relationship with the world beyond India and an orientation to the future. Tradition, in contrast, was something local and oriented towards the past. Thus, while people did not talk about the role of schools in shaping students' engagement with the traditional and the modern except when asked about it directly, there were other less abstract dichotomies – between the local and the global, the past and the future – that were central to people's concerns about schooling and about raising children more generally. Parents challenged the ability of Academic Heights to live up to the promises of its advertising and questioned whether 'tradition' should be explicitly taught in schools, but they accepted that a modern education and traditional values were things parents would want for their children and assumed that schools at least implicitly position themselves (as institutions) and their students in relation to an international future and a local past. The role of schools in constructing hierarchies of value in relation to the local and the global, the past

and the future can be better understood through examination of Riversdale's attempts to transform its students into 'global citizens'.

Riversdale's transformation from an SSC to a CBSE/IB school has not just involved a change of syllabus. The principal and management have instigated a number of policies which are aimed at the 'holistic development' of the child. As well as educating parents about the need for a new style of education, the school also provides information about nutrition. They tell parents that a mother's love should not be measured by how much rice she can get her child to eat and advise parents against the Andhra staples of *rasam* and curd rice. Children are not allowed to put oil in their hair as this does not 'look neat' and teachers are encouraged to wear *churidaar* or *salwaar kameez*, jeans and other western trousers instead of saris.²² The principal explained that

when society is changing, if you are not catching up with the trends in the society, you feel left out ... most of them come from very conventional families, conservative families where wearing trouser or wearing even *salwaar kameez* was not really taken. Saris are the most accepted normal dressing ... A trouser or a *salwaar kameez* will make you more flexible in the classroom, more approachable and ready to play with children. Plus you will feel that you are a part of what is happening in the society.

This view was clearly shared by a teacher who told me that his wife had not wanted to buy any clothing other than saris and *salwaar* because only these clothes were allowed at the school where she works. He persuaded her to buy 'pant and shirt' because "according to society we have to wear at least weekly. It is compulsory one day. That is my view". Practices discouraged at Riversdale are all associated with the past, with the village and with lower classes. These are attributes that might be described as *errabus* (see Chapter 3). Although all these changes are explained in practical terms, avoiding them also serves to distinguish Riversdale students from the lower classes and enables a 'progressive' and 'rational' presentation of self.

In addition to these 'practical' changes, the school has sought to develop the moral fibre of students with a strong message about religious belief. Teachers and students are very critical of following blind beliefs or superstitions and associate doing so with villagers, the uneducated and the elderly. A commonly cited example of such 'blind beliefs' is not going outside or eating during an eclipse. In contrast to these superstitions, Riversdale students and teachers describe 'Indian' (Hindu) 'traditions' that have a scientific basis. For example, putting turmeric on the feet and at the entrance to a house serves the scientific and practical purpose of repelling germs and insects, and hanging leaves over the door at festival time provides extra oxygen for crowded rooms. Teachers and students tell me that people, particularly uneducated villagers, would not have done these things had they thought it was only for a practical benefit and so religious reasons were provided.

A similar rationalising process has been adopted for many 'Indian' (again read 'Hindu') religious festivals. These are celebrated in the school in a secularized form with a focus on the universal and

²² *Churidaar* are tightly fitting trousers worn with a *kurta* (long shirt) and *chuni* or *dupatta* (scarf or shawl). *Salwaar kameez* refers to a similar outfit but with looser trousers. In Hyderabad people often use the words *churidaar* and *salwaar* to refer to the whole outfit including the *kurta* and *chuni/dupatta*.

practically beneficial values that they instil. For example, to celebrate the Hindu festival of Dassera students write all their bad habits on pieces of paper and throw these onto a fire along with an effigy of Ravana, the demon god slain by Rama. While doing so, they resolve not to continue with these bad habits. A contrast is thus constructed in the school between ‘blind beliefs’ followed by villagers and scientific, rational and moral practices which students should adopt to both better themselves as human beings and preserve ‘Indian culture and traditions’.²³ This appears to be a part of a wider attempt to distil a purified rationalized ‘Indian culture’ that Radhakrishnan (2011a) has described as ‘appropriate Indianness’. Such an attempt can also be seen in the school’s attitude to other aspects of social and cultural life in India. Like superstitions, caste and the subordination of women are associated with villages (and Rajasthan) and the old and ignorant, whereas knowledge of classical music and dance is strongly encouraged in the school.

Aside from explicitly belief-focused discussions, values in the school are predominantly taken from self-help literature, by both Indian and American authors, and from the life of Gandhi. Inspired by Gandhi, whose life was an ‘indivisible whole’, students are encouraged to have good character in all aspects of their lives – to ‘live life the lean way’ and to help the poor and needy. Steven Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* are displayed in the foyer of the senior wing (known as the ‘Leadership School’) and teachers frequently use the language of these ‘habits’ when praising or chastising students. The role of these ‘habits’ within the school appears to be to add an aura of moral righteousness to character traits necessary for success in an era of competitive individualism. Students are told to be ‘individuals’ who are creative and make their own decisions rather than doing things because others are or because they have been told to by their parents. They are encouraged to pursue careers of their own choosing that are best suited to their own unique talents. In the most explicit example of the value placed on individualism in the school, a workshop was held to educate all senior wing teachers about being more individualistic. The guest speaker, a ‘corporate coach’, told us that, in order to develop the nation, more individuals were needed rather than people with a ‘herd mentality’ who were merely extensions of their caste, creed or religion. In the weeks that followed teachers reproduced the same workshop in their classrooms.

‘Exposure’ at Riversdale is, then, part of a broader project of aligning with global rationalism, progressiveness and open-mindedness and distancing from the irrational, superstitious or backward practices of villagers, the poor and the uneducated. ‘Indian culture’ is not rejected, however. As discussed in the previous chapter, ‘Indian culture’ is valued as an inherent good and is very closely intertwined with middle-class notions of respectability. The cultural capital instilled in ‘exposure’ schools thus involves balancing these two moralities – respectable Indianness and a globally oriented ‘open-mindedness’. Riversdale students were taught to be progressive but respectable, patriotic but

²³ The Telugu for superstitions is *mūḍha namakaalu* which can be directly translated as stupid, foolish or ignorant beliefs. ‘Blind belief’ is a literal translation of the Sanskritic neologism Dayananda Sarasvati invented to translate ‘superstition’, namely *andhavisvas* (Bharati 1970). It was not possible to ascertain whether *mūḍha namakaalu* is a neologism (reflecting introduced ideas about the illegitimacy of some beliefs) or the extent to which the English and Telugu words used to talk about superstitions are translations of *andhavisvas*.

globally aware. Far from an emphatic rejection of one in favour of the other, upper middle-class cultural capital entails the ability to align with the reference points of each system of morality when appropriate. St Catherine's students had none of this kind of grooming.

Conclusion

In her analysis of status in Karimpur, Susan Wadley (1994) observed that 'knowledge and understanding' were used as a basis for age, gender and caste hierarchies. Men and upper castes were believed to have superior potential to understand and their control of the female and the poor was accordingly seen as legitimate (1994: 4, 67). Wadley suggested that "Now, new assumptions are ... calling into question whether the poor and the female really do lack 'understanding'" (1994: 5), as the expansion of education since the 1980s has begun "to challenge the right of the old elite to have control of knowledge and understanding" (1994: 210). In middle-class Hyderabad, although there is little legitimacy in the notion of an inherent superiority in the capacity for 'knowledge and understanding' in men and those of high caste-class status, the dominant have found new ways to assert the superiority of their knowledge. By assessing the English fluency and confidence of others, those of upper middle-class status look for evidence of the kinds of 'exposure' provided by the schools to which only their class equals and superiors have access. Those who fail to display appropriate 'communication skills' are likely to have their education deemed illegitimate – an exercise in thoughtless rote learning involving no genuine understanding. Thus, while education may have provided some opportunity for social mobility and has certainly helped destabilize the notion that those of low caste status and women are inherently lacking in 'knowledge and understanding,' the new concept of 'exposure' allows the 'knowledge and understanding' of those of low class-caste status to continue to be undermined and, as I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, also provides some justification for the subordination of women.

5

The New Indian Woman

The image below appears in an NCERT tenth class social studies textbook (Vasudevan 2007: 41) that was used at Riversdale. It shows the ideal viewer according to TV serial makers – two overweight, conservatively dressed middle- to upper-class women; the ideal beauty according to the fashion industry – a slim, busty, mini-dress clad young woman; the ideal bride according to prospective in-laws – her personal identity eclipsed by the money and goods she brings in the form of dowry; and the ideal employee according to employers and male employees – purely decorative like a vase of flowers. For society, the ideal woman is an ideal housewife – conservative in her sari, large *bindi*, and long plaited hair and with many hands for her cleaning and cooking tasks.²⁴ These pictures are clearly satirical in intent and unsurprisingly tenth class students were unanimous in their rejection of them. They agreed that these perceptions of women were prevalent in society, but said that the images did not reflect their own ideas. The girls insisted that they were represented by none of the images.

I asked the students to work in small groups on pictures of either ideal women or ideal men: according to society 20 years ago, according to society today and according to them. Most images of women depicted a shift from household work only to household *and* office work. One group drew a woman dressed in a sari standing next to a house and a *shiva lingam*. Her *pallu* (end of the sari) is pulled over her head in modesty and her hands are held together in prayer. The next image, of contemporary society's ideal, shows a woman with a handbag positioned next to floor plans of a home and an office. She is dressed in a *salwaar kameez* and her hair is untied. The caption reads: "Some think it would be better if women do job but others prefer if women only stays at home". The final image, representing their ideal, shows a young woman thinking "I should be able to do anything". Another series shows a woman in a sari who is "only to do work in house and not allowed to go out (house arrested)", a woman in a *salwaar kameez* who is "fulfilling works at home as well as in office", and, their personal ideal, "fashion and education" represented by a girl in a dress with closed, heeled shoes.

²⁴ The 'ideal housewife' is not as one-dimensional as she first appears. While she is in many ways an image of demure domesticity, she appears to hold a laptop in one hand and her many arms are in clear imitation of the many arms of the fierce invincible goddess Durga. She is therefore something of a 'new Indian woman' straddling home and world, and also embodies the classic duality in the concept of the female in Hindu ideology: "on the one hand, she is fertile, benevolent – the bestower; on the other, she is aggressive, malevolent – the destroyer" (Wadley 1977: 113). In this ideology, the female is both *shakti* – power/energy – and *prakriti* – nature. As uncultured power she appears as Kali the destroyer, an aspect of Durga, but we see female also as benevolent goddess when this natural power/sexuality comes under the control of the male principle of culture (Wadley 1977; see also Leslie 1989: 320). Tapper (1979) has argued in an account of cultural ideas of femininity in Andhra Pradesh that discourses that link women with excessive passion, lust and emotion are used to rationalise male authority and dominance. I do not explore such attitudes in this thesis as, despite describing public female sexuality as highly problematic, my informants did not explain this in terms of any inherent excess of passion or lust in women, focusing instead on the benevolent goddess side of this dualism.



Discuss all these perceptions of an ideal woman that prevail in our society. Do you agree with any of these? If not, what is your image of an ideal woman?

FIGURE 8: Image from an NCERT Class X Social Studies textbook

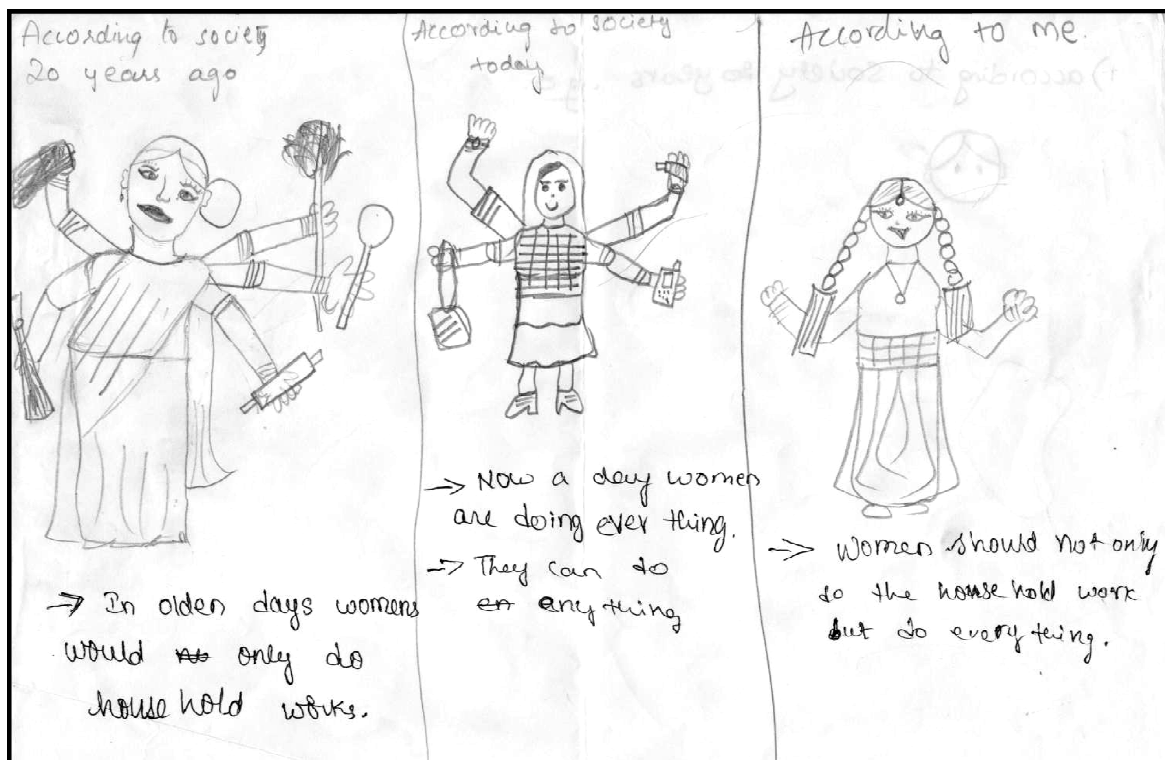


FIGURE 9: Drawing by Riversdale Tenth Class students
 ("The Ideal Woman: According to society 20 years ago, according to society today and according to me")

Some of the images of men showed a complementary shift in gender roles from idealization of the sole breadwinner agriculturalist who "always thought that their responsibility is always to earn" to a view that "now men should be also like an all-rounder like women managing their work at office and home". The ideal man according to society 20 years ago was represented by one group through a large picture of a man and a much smaller picture of a woman with the caption "discrimination". Another group described this ideal man as "very hardworking, religious beliefs, gets money by hardworking, very superstitious". As with the depictions of women, style and consumption featured prominently. Two groups contrasted contemporary society's view of the ideal man as "most stylish" and "trendy and luxurious" with their personal view of the ideal man as, in one case, someone who is "equal to women by doing household work and outside work" and, in the other, as "simple and gentle".

This exercise clearly calls for highly idealized, stereotyped images and it is necessary, therefore, to be very cautious about drawing any conclusions. It is nevertheless interesting to note the degree to which the image of 'woman as housewife' appears to have been delegitimized to make room for the professional woman and, for some students, the man who helps at home. The use of clothing to indicate changing roles and the use of technology – the (Dell) laptop – to signify ideal employment are also informative.

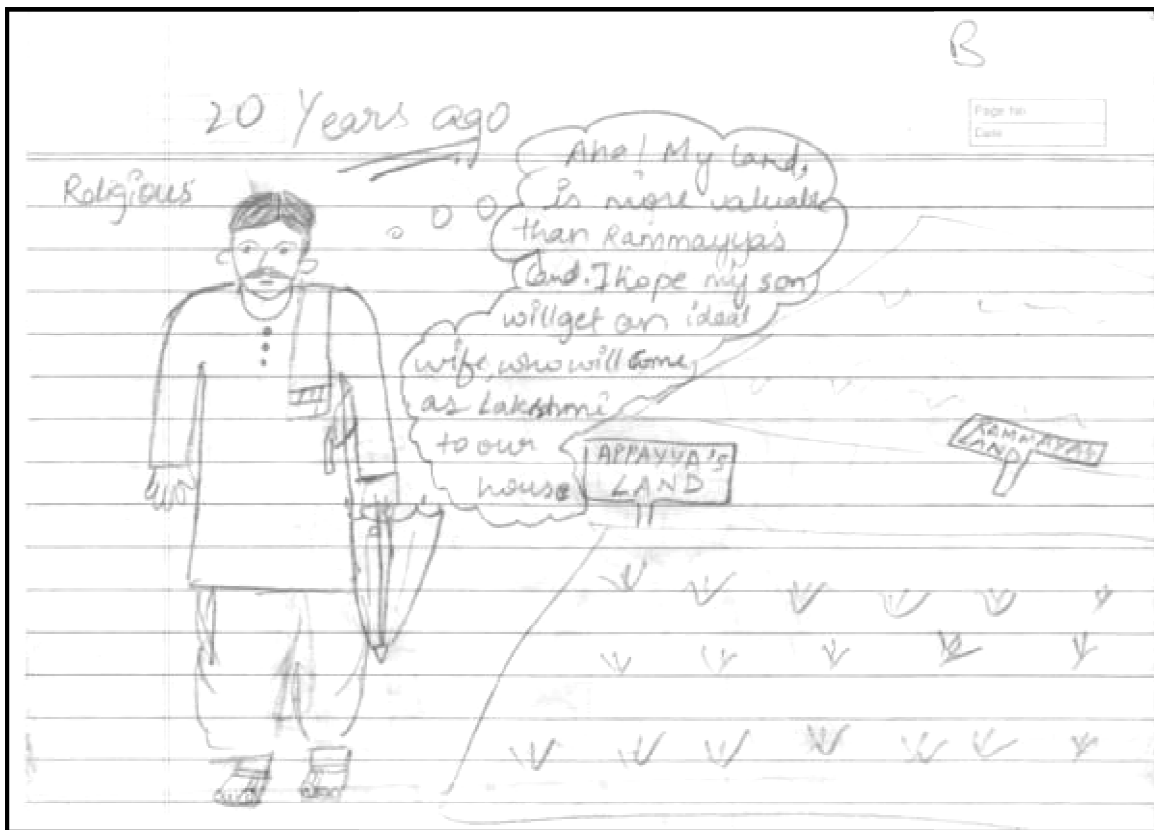


FIGURE 10: Drawing by Riversdale Tenth Class students; 'The Ideal Man: According to society 20 years ago' (Text in thought bubble reads: "Aha! My land is more valuable than Rammayya's land. I hope my son will get an ideal wife, who will come as Lakshmi to our house")

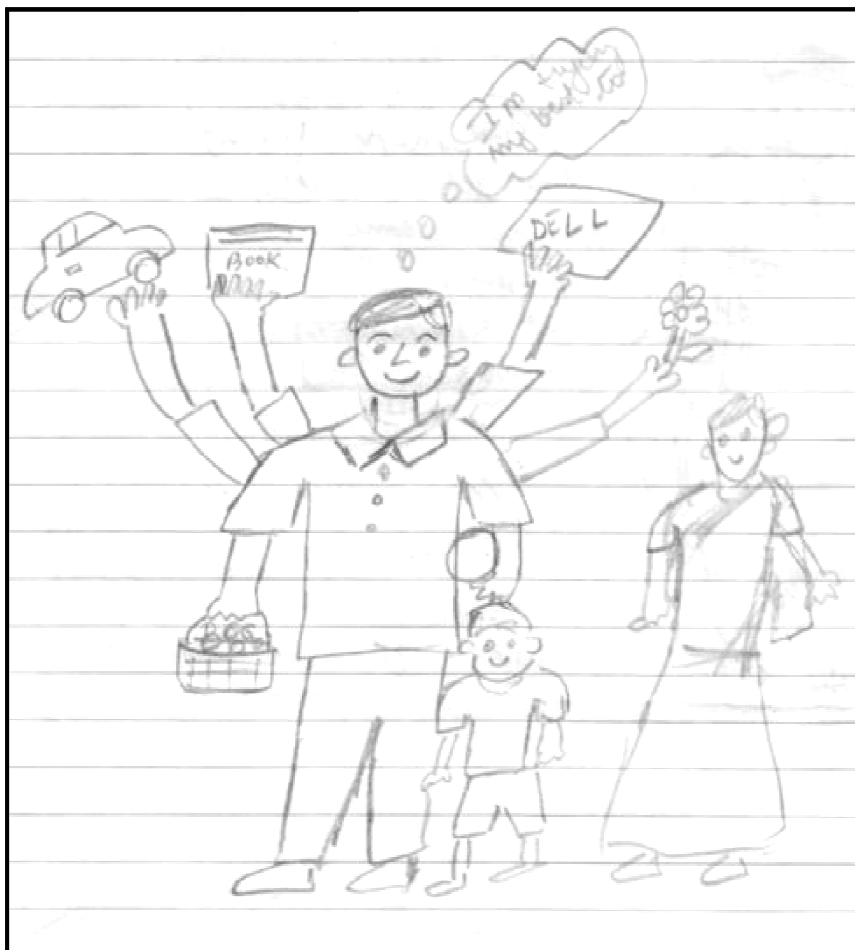


FIGURE 11: Drawing by Riversdale Tenth Class students; 'The Ideal Man: According to me' (Text in thought bubble reads: "I'm trying my best to[o]")

The ideals expressed in students' drawings reflect many of the themes of this chapter and those that follow: increased acceptance of women in paid employment and education, as well as the idea that only certain kinds of employment are appropriate (Chapter 5), and that women need to carefully manage their image through dress (Chapter 7). These chapters are full of contradictions – women should enter paid work, but only if it is prestigious work and only if they continue to prioritize domestic responsibilities; girls should be educated but not so much so that their chances of a good marriage are endangered; women should be confident and assertive (perceived benefits of education and employment), but not to the extent that they cause conflict in their families (Chapter 6). These contradictions reflect the rapidity of social change in Hyderabad, the perception that women should act as a counterbalance to that change, and the uncertainties of being 'in the middle' in class terms. It will become evident that discourses of respectability and open-mindedness are as central to processes of negotiating change and asserting status in relation to gender as they are to class. Before describing changing ideas about the 'ideal woman' in Hyderabad, some historical context is necessary.

Colonial and Post-Liberalization Feminine Ideals

Writing of the nineteenth century European middle classes, Mosse (1985: 17) observed that woman "was idealized as the guardian of morality ... As a national symbol, woman was the guardian of the traditional order. Always woman exemplified virtue". In India a similar intertwining of nationalism, femininity and notions of middle-class morality is evident as the virtues of *pativrata*, the perfect wife (Leslie 1989), were combined with the Victorian image of the 'perfect lady' (Banerjee 2006: 78). During the early and mid-nineteenth century in Bengal, the efforts of middle-class and elite Indians to reform their society and culture were focused on issues of particular relevance for women – child marriage, *sati* (widow self-immolation), dowry, widow remarriage – but by the end of the century such issues had been sidelined by the nationalist movement. According to Partha Chatterjee (1993), Indian nationalism followed colonialist discourse in taking up the 'Woman Question' as a problem of 'Indian tradition'. The nationalists split the domain of culture into two spheres – the material and the spiritual – and sought "to cultivate the material techniques of modern Western civilization while retaining and strengthening the distinctive spiritual essence of the national culture" (ibid.: 120). The distinction between the material and the spiritual was condensed into a dichotomy between the outer practical world of men and the inner domestic sphere of women, not unlike the public-private divide created in bourgeois Victorian Britain. Thus, Chatterjee (ibid.: 126) argues,

The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the main responsibility for protecting and nurturing this quality. No matter what the changes in the external conditions of life for women, they must not lose their essentially spiritual (that is, feminine) virtues; they must not, in other words, become essentially

Westernized ... There would have to be a marked *difference* in the degree and manner of Westernization of women, as distinct from men, in the modern world of the nation.

In this model, the changes in the lives of men could be compensated for by women's assertion of spiritual purity.

This 'new Indian woman' was expected to acquire the cultural refinements afforded by formal education in order to be a worthy companion to her husband, but without losing her feminine (spiritual) virtues and jeopardizing her place in the home. Thus, while women were to be educated, this education was of a different character to that provided for boys due to the belief that, "The Hindu girl has functions of a very different nature to perform from those of a Hindu boy ... The education we give our girls should not unsex them" (colonial advocate for women's education quoted in Kumar 1993: 29). 'Freed' from the oppression of a degenerate patriarchy, she was now able to play a role in producing and supporting the men who would march the nation into modernity (Mankekar 1999: 156). She could go to school, travel in public and watch public entertainment, as long as she maintained the spiritual signs of her femininity in her dress, eating habits, social demeanour and religiosity. This new 'freedom' was thus predicated on a new concern for refinement and propriety. This was a new form of patriarchy entirely legitimized in terms of women's social responsibility for the preservation of a national culture (Chatterjee 1993: 130).

During the 1980s women came to be viewed as having increasing significance as a political constituency and their potential to contribute to India's development was highlighted by the state (Mankekar 1999: 106). This resulted in another new construction of the Indian woman. As Mankekar (1999: 137) argues,

Unlike the late nineteenth century, when the Woman Question was 'resolved' by demarcating the private sphere (of women) from the public sphere (of men), late twentieth-century constructions of the New Indian Woman *complicated* notions of women's agency by valorising 'emancipated' women who dextrously straddled the 'home' and the 'world'".

This new Indian woman draws her moral authority to engage with the world from her fidelity to 'traditional' roles in the home (ibid.: 149). She has a new assertiveness and autonomy afforded by her education and earnings, but this must be channelled in the service of the family and the nation (Mankekar 1999: 151-2; Rajan 1993: 131).

As the image of a united Indian family continues to function as a centrally important symbol of the uniqueness and strength of 'Indian culture', ideal womanhood is expected to function simultaneously in the service of the family and the national culture (Mankekar 1999: 157-8). With women's roles embroiled in notions of Indian heritage and their emancipation co-opted in the service of Indian culture and the Indian family, critique of gender relations, particularly in the context of the family, is extremely sensitive. Critically engaging with dominant discourses of family and national culture becomes almost impossible (Mankekar 1999: 148). As Rajan (1993: 136) argues, the post-liberalization image of the new Indian woman aligns "women's rights and the family's well-being as

being directed toward the same goal” and thus “defuses the conflicts between women and the family which is such a crucial feature of contemporary Indian society”.

The conduct of the Indian woman has to be monitored not only because she is the repository of authentic Indianness, but also because of her centrality to notions of middle-class respectability. Because being middle-class is a moral virtue, and because respectability, sexual modesty and family honour are predicated on the behaviour of women, women’s bodies, movements, behaviour, clothes and speech patterns have to be carefully managed by those seeking to maintain a precarious class position or to improve it (Mankekar 1999). The new Indian woman of the nationalist movement was thus distinguished not only from her vilified Western counterpart, but also from the ‘common’ woman understood to be coarse, loud, quarrelsome, lacking in moral value, sexually promiscuous, an ignorant and haphazard mother and a victim of male greed and brutal physical oppression (Chatterjee 1993: 127; Hancock 1999: 62). According to Mary Hancock (1999: 62), elites subsumed class and caste privilege in an image of the ideal woman “as a dedicated mother, pious ritual actor, and rational consumer” in contrast to poor and low-caste women (often labourers), and in doing so reframed bourgeois domesticity and femininity “as ‘natural’ emblems of nationhood”.

The ideal woman of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is similarly middle-class and upper-caste. Through advertising, television serials and film she emerges as the attractive, educated professional who makes conscious and deliberate consumer choices in the service of her one- or two-child family (Rajan 1993: 131). Lower class-caste femininity is thus constructed today, as it was during the colonial period, as inherently lacking in respectability and un-Indian. In order to claim respect, lower class-caste women must be particularly stringent in their adoption of ‘traditional’ domesticated female roles.

In this chapter and the two that follow I explore the changing lives of middle-class women in Hyderabad and the ways in which these changes are evaluated. This chapter is about the difficulty of straddling the ‘home’ and the ‘world,’ particularly for lower middle-class women. I then explore, in Chapter 6, the rise of the companionate marriage ideal and the limited equality it has afforded women in their homes, before turning in Chapter 7 to the complexities of class and gender in the use of public space and in courtship practices. In all of these chapters a clear tension emerges in informants’ narratives between a desire to appear ‘open-minded’ and ‘progressive’ in relation to matters of gender (in)equality and a concern for middle-class respectability and ‘Indian culture.’

Women in Paid Employment

In the schools where I did research – lower middle-class St Catherine’s and upper middle-class Riversdale – the vast majority of mothers were housewives. This occupation was given for mothers by 91 per cent of surveyed students at St Catherine’s and 76 per cent at Riversdale. Despite these figures, there can be no doubt that employment rates for females are increasing among my participant

group, particularly among the upper middle class. Far more younger women than older women were employed and people I spoke to stressed that there had been significant changes in women's roles from a situation where women did not leave the house and 'did not know anything' to the present, more favourable situation, in which women are more educated, knowledgeable about the world outside their homes and increasingly represented in the work force. Most upper middle-class people I spoke to assumed it was normal and admirable to want to work. For example, a 42-year-old father of a Riversdale student told me: "Slowly the culture is changing. Nobody likes to sit at home."* Although his own wife was a housewife, he seemed embarrassed about this and told me several times that she could not work due to health problems. Some spoke quite negatively of staying at home, suggesting that women who did so were idle and did little but engage in chit-chat and gossip.²⁵

The trend towards working women is less pronounced among the lower middle class. In some families, previous generations of women had worked as agricultural labourers, but urbanization and social mobility had led to a generation of housewives. Among this group of informants it was widely accepted that in most cases a woman should only work if her income was needed for family survival. A group of St Catherine's teachers told me that women work if they need the money or "have the passion"*. They felt that the increased cost of living meant that more women were having to work and joked that, in contrast to the past when men prevented their wives from entering paid employment, now some men are forcing their wives to work. They told me that the first question men ask a prospective bride is whether she will work as they hope to get an additional income along with their new spouse. One of these women posed the rhetorical question: "If he [the husband] is getting a good salary, then why should you [the wife] work?"* By these teachers' own logic, the answer to this would be because the woman had a passion for working, but they seemed to think that most women did not have such passion and would prefer to stay home if this was a financially viable option.

The differences in the attitudes of lower and upper middle-class informants towards women in paid employment reflect the different types of employment available to them. A Riversdale mother told me that in the past people gave "importance" to women who stayed at home and women who were seen out of the house were not respected. In contrast, today when people visit someone's home they ask what their hosts' daughter does and give more respect to families in which the daughter is "doing job". No doubt this Riversdale mother took it for granted that the daughter would be doing office work rather than menial work. Staying at home remains more prestigious than low-status work.²⁶

²⁵ This perception of upper middle-class housewives as having little to do was not wholly inaccurate as, although most middle and upper middle-class housewives spent a significant amount of time purchasing, preparing and cooking food, they employed domestic servants and did tend to have many free hours in each day. Unlike in the field sites of Caplan (1985) and Donner (2005; 2008), mothers did not have to devote significant amounts of time to their children's education. Some mothers did quit their jobs when their children were in 10th class so they could be home to check their children were studying, but in general tuitions provided at school and private tuitions seem to have taken the place of intense maternal supervision (see Chapter 4).

²⁶ Denise Lett (1998: 61) has made similar remarks regarding South Korea's new urban middle class.

The trajectories of many of the lower middle-class families from labouring wives to housewives echo the changes described by Clarinda Still (2007: 282) in relation to Dalits in rural Andhra Pradesh. Among her informants the economically unproductive housewife was a status symbol sought by upwardly mobile parents who educated their daughters in the hope of marrying them into families that would not require them to labour in the fields. In this form of upward mobility, women are turned from valuable (but exhausted and poorly remunerated) workers into sedentary, non-earning (but comfortable and honourable) status producers (see also Kapadia 1995). As Caroline and Filippo Osella (2000: 41) argue “low-status work is highly gendered and is thought to say something about both the type of woman who does it and type of family she comes from”. For a woman’s employment to be considered worthwhile, the “benefits should be high enough to outweigh possible prestige losses” (ibid.: 45).

Upper middle-class families were advantaged in two ways. They were unlikely to lose status through suspicions that they were putting their women to work out of necessity and women were more likely to have the education and other resources necessary to secure prestigious work, i.e., high status in terms of skills required or pay (e.g. IT sector and marketing employment) or in terms of social respect (e.g. teaching). As the only respectable occupation for which lower middle-class women have sufficient education is teaching, they tend to only work in non-teaching jobs when their income is needed. Thus, the greater the social and financial distance a family had from manual labour the more likely they were to have a favourable opinion of women working.

A shift towards women in paid employment does not appear to have led to any significant redistribution of domestic responsibilities. Other researchers have observed that despite discourses of “the modern ‘new woman’ with endless lifestyle choices”, most Indian families maintain conventional gender roles (Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase 2008: 178) and this was also the case in suburban, middle-class Hyderabad. My dynamic young friends in Hyderabad spoke enthusiastically about their futures as successful doctors, engineers, journalists, fashion designers, scientists, etc. Only one girl, a tenth class student at St Catherine’s, told me she did not want to work after marriage. Her friends who were being interviewed at the same time gasped at her response and she sheepishly said that she did not know why she did not want to work. Nevertheless, it was made clear to me again and again that the primary duty of any ‘respectable’ woman was to care for her home, her husband and her children.

People were very critical of working women who appeared to be neglecting their household duties. A woman was expected to prioritize cleaning, cooking and childcare over career. I was told a number of times, while looking for a research assistant and in other contexts, that a recently married woman would not want to work. She would want to devote herself entirely to caring for her husband and only once she had thus earned his affection could she broach the topic of returning to work. As well as recently married women, those with young children were also expected to stay at home. Most of the working women I knew had been housewives for several years until their children were old enough to go to school. The two working women I knew who had pre-school children lived with

mothers-in-law who provided childcare. Leaving young children in the care of strangers was portrayed as dangerous – children were said to learn ‘bad habits’ in crèche and popular urban myths circulated about servants who drugged their employers’ babies and took them out begging. These myths functioned, as similar stories did in the domestic manuals of colonial Bengal, “to instill fear in the minds of young mothers by outlining the dangers that might result from entrusting child-care to servants” (Banerjee 2006: 85).

If a woman is unable to balance work and home, it is always work that should be the first to go. I was told many stories about negligent working women, usually software engineers. Sushma, a Riversdale mother recounted scandalous rumours she had heard about a woman who lived in the same apartment block. Apparently this woman, an employee of Kingfisher Airlines, never cooks and instead she and her husband always eat takeaways (which they can afford because both are working). Sushma had heard that this woman’s house is dirty and that she refuses to employ a cleaner. The Kingfisher woman speaks English well and is well-presented, but apparently does not open the door to anyone. Sushma claimed that she too dislikes unexpected visitors, but does not reject all visitors in the same way the Kingfisher woman does. This working woman has thus failed, according to local ideals, in all her womanly duties – cooking, keeping the house clean (either personally or via a servant) and being hospitable to any guests that drop by. Priya, a female middle middle-class Riversdale staff member in her thirties gave the following example of women’s liberation going too far:

Priya: Now women are studying so they’re getting the confidence ... but it should not be overconfidence ... we should tell them [our children] where they should draw that line.

AG: Can you give an example of over-confidence?

Priya: The wife saying she isn’t going to prepare food. This mostly happens with women in software. Women are for cooking, men are not for cooking ... They’re [software engineers] earning more so they’re thinking that why should I cook, why should I care? ... woman is there for cooking so when man is asking you have to cook ... I don’t like cooking... but I can’t say no. When he asks something, I have to do; it’s a part of life.*²⁷

Priya and Sushma give examples of women who have high ‘public’ economic and cultural capital – they have good jobs, are well-presented and speak good English – but are perceived to have sacrificed ‘private’ forms of cultural capital based on ideals of the perfect wife. These examples make it clear that the value and legitimacy of different forms of capital depend to a large extent on gender.

My research suggests that working women are increasingly accepted and even desired as wives in suburban, middle-class Hyderabad. While the lower middle class focused on the advantage of additional income, the narratives of the upper middle class suggested that to be in favour of women working is to show that one is ‘open-minded’ and not constrained by the irrational prejudices of the past. Women are, nevertheless, still expected to take primary responsibility for the home and the family and are expected to prioritize these over education and career. This is consistent with Fuller

²⁷ The term ‘more’, as in, ‘They’re earning more’, is often used instead of ‘a lot’ in Hyderabad, due to a direct translation of the Telugu equivalent, *ekkanna*.

and Narasimham's (2006b: 138-140) research on IT professionals in Chennai. They found increased gender equality in the fact that one fifth of employees were women; there was no objection evident to single working women; women were not underpaid or exploited, and they had a sense of 'individual autonomy'. However, there were significant differences between men and women's attitudes to family, with married women professionals consistently giving their families higher priority than their work. Fuller and Narasimham argue that the IT industry had not revolutionized the position of Indian women, although changes were evident. Radhakrishnan (2011a: 151-2; 2011b) similarly found that the role models of female transnational IT professionals were those women who were perceived to have achieved a good balance between home and work life, usually by prioritising family over career, the moral value of which was never questioned.

Women's responsibility for domestic work provides another explanation for lower middle-class women's greater reluctance to enter paid employment. Almost all the middle and upper middle-class families I knew employed servants to clean the house and dishes and in a small number of homes servants also helped prepare food. All the working women I knew found balancing their work and home lives challenging. Many woke at five in the morning to cook breakfast and lunch before leaving for work and were faced with preparing another meal when they returned in the evening. Those who do not have domestic help frequently appeared exhausted and complained that their workload was almost impossible to manage. It is not surprising that faced with the double burden of paid and domestic work, lower middle-class women found the prospect of a housewife lifestyle desirable.

Although some women complained of tiredness or that their mothers-in-law could be more helpful, they did not say that their husbands should be helping them. Some women's husbands do help with the housework – packing food into lunch boxes, preparing vegetables and occasionally cooking a meal when their wives are particularly busy or unwell – but these incidents were always described as an exception to the norm of entirely unhelpful husbands.²⁸ Similar levels of male involvement in domestic work have been documented in other studies of urban India. In her account of white-collar workers in Meerut, Sylvia Vatuk (1972: 123) relates that in urban nuclear households men played a greater role in housework and childcare than in rural or urban households in which the husband's parents were present. Men occasionally entertained children while their wives prepared meals, or helped with minor tasks such as vegetable preparation. Ursula Sharma's informants in Shimla talked positively about the helpfulness of their husbands, but this help amounted to little more than caring for children while wives did housework and not complaining or making excessive demands (1986: 73). In these cases, as in my research, the notion that a man will lose respect if he engages in household work (Chowdhry 1994: 263) appears to have been replaced with the idea that a

²⁸ The contrast between the lack of demands these women place on their husbands and the children's expectations that men should help at home (shown in their drawings above) may suggest something of a revolution in gender roles some years down the line. It may also be the case that the helpful husbands depicted by students are expected to do little more than the 'helpful' husbands described here.

helpful husband is a positive sign of a progressive, open-minded family. Men were not, however, expected to take any *responsibility* for household work. The fact that the middle-class women I spoke to did not expect their husbands to play a more significant role in domestic work was made particularly clear in discussions of 'house-husbands'.

When I asked how they felt about women going to work and men staying at home to care for children and do the housework, almost all informants reacted negatively. A few people, among the wealthiest and most exposed to the world outside India, stated that they would accept a man as 'house-husband' saying that people should do whatever worked for them, but most responses ranged from openly appalled by the idea to acceptance of the idea in principle but insistence that it could never work in India. A number of reasons were given for this. Many people regarded women as *naturally* better suited to housework and, particularly, childcare. For example, an upper middle-class Riversdale teacher in her thirties told me that women had an in-built caring nature and a middle middle-class Riversdale teacher in her forties reasoned that women's greater patience made their primary responsibility for childcare the 'natural system': "To give a birth to a child shows the maximum level of patience of a lady, so naturally the ladies are having the more patience level and all." Some argued that men were naturally better suited to paid employment. They talked about men's superior physical strength and the fact that they did not suffer the debilitating effects of childbirth and menstruation. Informants also mentioned men's ability to travel and work at night without suffering harassment and/or loss of honour.

Middle-class Hyerabadis talked about the loss of status that a man would suffer if he did not work outside the home. A St Catherine's mother told me that a man who stayed at home would get no respect from society or from his wife and children, and would have no value: "For each and every small thing he will depend on his wife and later on he will not be fit for anything and society will not respect such things."¹ A few lower middle-class teachers said it would not be acceptable if the man stayed at home because today two incomes are needed to survive. An upper middle-class Riversdale mother and housewife explained the general view of how the roles should be divided:

Nobody asks if a wife, you know, doesn't work or she sits at home. Nobody even points a finger at her. She is not supposed to do outside job. She supposed to take care of the household. It's the man who supposed to look after the family. He should be the financial supporter. So definitely people will point fingers at him and definitely he doesn't have certain respect [if he is a 'house-husband'].

I was told repeatedly that the existing gendered division is simply the way it works in India; it is 'Indian culture'. A Riversdale teacher in her fifties told me: "Sharing [the housework] is always good, but responsibility is ladies' ... for cooking and household works, responsibility is ladies' ... India's culture is like that – good or bad, I don't think. We are habituated like that." To criticize women's role in the household was to criticize 'Indian heritage' and was therefore never done with any conviction.

When one considers the prevalence of housewife ideals among Still's (2007) rural Dalit informants and my lower middle-class informants, and contrasts these with the attitudes of upper middle-class Hyderabadis, it appears that attitudes towards women in paid employment are, like the *purdah* practices described by Mandelbaum (1988: 37), "an important part of the movement by which materially successful groups of the lower echelons of a local hierarchy adopt traditionally prestigious practices. At the same time those of the higher echelons are dropping some of those customs and taking on others of a modern cachet." Nevertheless, people of all socioeconomic groups stressed the need for changing gender roles to remain 'within the limits'. Such limits often related to sexuality and power-sharing in marriage (see Chapters 6 and 7) but they were almost always expressed in terms of women neglecting their duties of housework and childcare.

The above discussion demonstrates that although the middle-class Hyderabadis I spoke to appeared to be becoming increasingly accepting of women in paid employment this by no means represents a wholesale revolution in gender roles. Upper middle-class participants in particular sought to present themselves as open-minded and progressive by expressing positive attitudes towards women's increased involvement in the public sphere. However, whether a man or woman is deemed worthy of respect is determined by their involvement in paid employment and domestic work respectively. Employed women's honour is at risk unless their jobs are particularly prestigious and their primary responsibilities continue to be domestic. As a married female software worker told me: "now the working woman is actually more in a difficult position because she has to take care of home and come back from office and take care of the kid and make dinner." Changes in the division of labour in middle-class Hyderabad thus appeared to result in a double burden for women. Their ability to cope uncomplainingly with this burden was an index of their status as ideal wives and mothers, as new Indian women able to successfully straddle the home and the world.

Domestication of Female Education

Scholars writing on the difficulty of educating girls in India have identified a range of factors that make parents reluctant to send their daughters to school and college. Education is seen to be unnecessary for a girl whose primary responsibilities will be housework and childcare. Even if a girl is expected to enter paid employment, her salary will benefit her husband's family and not her parents. Investment in a son's education is thus more financially prudent as he will be expected to support his parents in their old age. Parents also worry that daughters travelling to and from college and/or studying at co-educational colleges will be vulnerable to relationships that threaten family honour and may damage chances of a good marriage. 'Over-educating' girls is another a problem. Although some level of education is necessary to attract a middle-class groom, no man wants to marry a woman who is more qualified than he is. A family must consider whether they can afford a dowry for a more qualified husband before educating their daughter to a higher level. Failing to achieve the right

balance in this regard is likely to make it difficult for parents to marry their daughter (Still 2007: 264-65; Gold 2002).

Although there is significant evidence of a reducing disparity in educational attainment between men and women, data collected as part of the 2005-2006 National Family Health Survey indicate that at that time the percentage of Indian young women without any education was almost three times the figure for young men. While 38 per cent of Indian young men had completed 10 or more years of education, only 29 per cent of Indian young women had achieved the same (Parasuraman et al. 2009: 9). However, the gap between men and women is significantly reduced in urban areas where 47 per cent of young women and 49 per cent of young men have completed 10 or more years of education, compared to 20 and 31 per cent of rural young women and men respectively. The strongest determinant of gendered educational disparities is wealth with 69.5 per cent of young women and 69.4 per cent of young men in the highest wealth quintile having completed 10 or more years of education compared to 3.4 per cent of young women and 10.4 per cent of young men in the lowest wealth quintile (ibid.: 10). Data on Hyderabad specifically indicate that when the slum-dwelling population is excluded, the levels of literacy and education are in fact slightly higher for young women than for young men (ibid.: 12).

These figures lead us to believe that my middle-class Hyderabadi informants would express little concern about educating their daughters. My conversations with informants indicated that equal education for boys and girls was widely accepted as an ideal, but it was only those without financial constraints who were able to commit to this ideal without hesitation. Furthermore, normative statements about the need to treat boys and girls equally often masked differences in the perceived *purposes* of girls' and boys' education which gave rise to subtle differences in the significance attached to the education of sons and daughters.

Almost everyone I spoke to in Hyderabad insisted on the importance of educating girls. Many vehemently denied the possibility of a girl being *too* educated and insisted that providing a good education for their daughters was the most important thing to them. This perception that boys and girls should be educated equally was described as a recent and urban phenomenon. Some female informants had experienced discrimination themselves and others located such discrimination in their mothers' or grandmothers' lives:

When we were studying, my brother was sent to an English medium school and the girls were sent to a Telugu medium school. When I asked my parents about this they said that as he is a boy he needs to be able to care for the family. I didn't complain or challenge them as this would not have been respectful* (Middle middle-class female Riversdale teacher).

There is no difference between girls and boys. During my grandmother's days they thought there was no need for girls to go to school. They thought girls should take care of the children and the home. Now the thinking is completely changed* (Middle middle-class female Riversdale teacher).

The concerns that other researchers have identified as causing people to limit the education of their daughters were also described by my informants, but such concerns were located in the past and in villages. Limiting a girl's education was framed as a 'backward' practice no longer appropriate in the contemporary urban environment where a greater degree of 'open-mindedness' is expected. For example, a 34-year-old Riversdale teacher told me that when she had started college her father had made it clear to her that he was taking a risk and putting a lot of trust in her and that she should not in any way betray his trust. She was happy to be married in her second year of college as this meant there was no longer any danger of becoming 'infatuated' and entering into a potentially disastrous relationship. She thinks that in her daughter's case, the dangers of 'getting attractions' can be avoided by advising her on where to 'draw the line', rather than by marrying her before she completes her degree.

A small number of informants admitted that they had, or were planning to, limit the education of female family members. I interviewed Srinu, whose son was in tenth class at St Catherine's, in their home in a Miyapur *basti*. The one room in which they live is unfurnished and barely big enough for the family to lie down in to sleep. Srinu's wife washes clothes and he does whatever work he can get – as a labourer on building sites or helping people carry their possessions when moving house. With an income of around Rs 5000 per month, they were not really middle-class and I do not know how they managed to pay their son's school fees. Srinu told me that he and his wife had struggled in life because they were uneducated and thus unable to get good jobs. He hopes that, with the education he was providing, his children would be able to get good jobs and would not have to suffer as he had. However, Srinu told me that he had wanted to discontinue his daughter's education after tenth class as he did not think it was necessary for girls to study further. He had agreed to let her continue in a government intermediate college after she begged him to do so. She has promised to stop studying after intermediate even if she still wants to study at this time. Srinu will allow his son to study for as long as he wants. He would like his son to become a doctor, but does not think he will be able to afford the university fees. He did not talk about his aspirations for his daughter's career, but told me he would like her to marry in about three years.

Another St Catherine's father, slightly better-off than Srinu but still barely lower middle class, explained to me how he had decided to discontinue the education of his elder daughter:

I am scared of girls' education because a girl can't simply go and work like a boy does. If girls work, they have to go to the workplace and have to board the bus or other means of transportation and the boys might tease the girl ... I made my daughter to get educated but I got scared and stopped her education. Due to circumstances in society I stopped her education, circumstances such as boys teasing the girls on the bus.^T

His elder daughter resents the fact that she was not allowed to study further and her father now regrets his decision. He plans to allow his younger daughter to study for as long as she wants.

Reflection on the perceived *purpose* of educating girls provides some context for why upper middle-class informants appeared so certain in their desire to equally educate sons and daughters

while some poor and lower middle-class informants expressed conflicted views. As I demonstrated in the previous section of this chapter, although the middle-class Hyderabadis I spoke to were, broadly speaking, accepting and even supportive of women in paid employment, all identified women's primary responsibilities as housework and childcare. Ultimate responsibility for household income was the husband's. This was clearly a factor in parents' decisions to limit their investment in the education of their daughters.

My questions about *why* it was important to educate girls were usually met with pat responses: 'There is no difference between girls and boys'; 'Both are human beings'. Further probing often led to answers that pointed to shifting gender roles and women's empowerment. People frequently talked about the potential for independence provided by education – an educated woman would not have to depend on her husband or family:

Earlier the boy was the breadwinner and the girl was at home. The girl should also have economic independence. Economic independence gives you a say in the family. You don't have to ask every time you want to buy something. You don't have to be answerable to somebody for everything you do* (Upper middle-class female Riversdale teacher).

Many people told me that if a woman's husband became ill, died or left her or was not a good provider, her education would provide her with the means to better deal with such problems. As Sylvia Vatuk (1972: 79) points out, identifying a need for self-support is itself a sign of changing times because in the past male relatives would have been expected to support a woman in such circumstances. Some middle-class Hyderabadis argued that education improves the status of women or, as one woman put it, their husbands could no longer dominate them. Along with the responses already mentioned, teachers at Riversdale frequently commented on more psychological benefits of education for women, particularly self-esteem, confidence and individuality.

Parents often seemed to have the same career hopes and aspirations for daughters as they did for sons. As mentioned in the chapter on education, the lower middle-class parents were especially focused on the possibility of their children becoming doctors or engineers, something that would bring prestige to the whole family and would ensure a more stable middle-class position for future generations. Daughters frequently featured in parents' narratives as potential sources of such future prestige and financial security. When faced with the hypothetical situation of being unable to invest equally in all their children's education, parents claimed they would make decisions based on the performance of the child. Indeed, girls were often seen as more 'sincere' students, making them common vehicles for parental aspirations. Family size is undoubtedly also a factor here. As the vast majority of middle-class Hyderabadis only have one or two children, their chances of having a son in whom to invest are much lower. With no sons to support them in their old age, parents might reasonably expect that daughters will provide some support and this may further encourage them to invest in a daughter's education.

However, these widely prevalent discourses of education as a route to prestigious employment and other forms of social status for women were outweighed by discourses of educating girls to be better wives and mothers. The prioritising of the domestic role discussed in relation to paid employment was also evident in discussions of education. For example, a Riversdale 8th class social studies exam question – “Were reforms necessary for women? Do you think education makes women leave their homes?” – immediately alerts us to the fact that education is perceived as problematic if it results in women leaving their homes. Student responses that were awarded full marks make it clear that the main benefit of education for women is that it improves their abilities to carry out their primary duties – household work and childcare – and not that it enables them to enter paid employment:

Yes, reforms are necessary for the upliftment of women in the society. But if a women is education [sic] she does not live [leave] her home but she will be able to take her own decisions about her family. She can manage her household work very actively and also manage the income and budget of the family. She is the pillar of the [family] which helps in building a house and takes care of the family.

No, I don't think that education makes a woman leave their [sic] home because as a mother she must take care of children and as a wife will take care of house. So, education is also important to women in society.²⁹

During my time in Hyderabad I was repeatedly told by children, teachers and parents that it was important to educate girls because they would educate their families and this would ultimately lead to the development of the Indian nation. In her account of gender, nationalism and television in middle-class Delhi of the 1990s, Purnima Mankekar (1999: 131-36) has written of the pervasive message communicated through state television of the centrality of female education to the progress or development of both the family and the nation. My informants had clearly absorbed this message. As a middle middle-class Riversdale mother explained:

The girl should be educated because the main role in the family is the woman's only. If a woman is educated means the entire family can be educated and the state can be educated and the village can be educated ... She also can teach and share her feelings and encourage her children. If children have any doubts [questions], to some extent she doesn't have to depend on private tuitions. She can plan for the future of her children and give support. If the husband can't earn enough, then the wife can also earn and support the family.*

When reading and listening to such responses I was struck by their “domestication of female learning” (Raheja & Gold 1994: 189). Education was problematic if it led women to escape the domestic sphere, but desirable if put to use within the home.

Because women's ability to earn was secondary to their success as wives and mothers, different significance was attached to their education. A 16-year-old intermediate college student, Vamsi, and his 14-year-old sister, Swetha, told me with great conviction about the importance of educating girls

²⁹ I collected marked exam scripts from students and collated their answers.

as well as boys. Swetha and her parents seem to think that she will study whatever she wants for as long as she wants. Yet Swetha's mother told me (with Swetha translating) that she worries a lot more about Vamsi's education because one day he will have to support a wife, children and his parents. While they would not discourage Swetha from studying, they do not worry about her education as they believe one day she will be supported by a man and will only have to work if she wants to. Vamsi's and Swetha's parents are fortunate to be able to easily afford the school and college fees of both their children. If this were not the case it is not difficult to imagine in which child they would invest most heavily.

Although a man's success as a husband, and thus his marriageability, is closely connected to his success as a breadwinner, this is not the case for a woman, at least not so directly and centrally. Parents therefore have to consider how a girl's education will impact on her ability to find a good husband. A middle middle-class Riversdale father who had been relatively poor in his youth explained to me how his perceptions of female education had changed alongside changes in the marriage market:

I have two sisters and I never allowed them to study after tenth class because our family would not have been able to get them married in that high level. In those days if a girl studied to a higher level she had to marry a boy who had studied to an even higher level. To get such a husband you needed to pay a very big dowry which we could not afford. That is why I have built my career. I struggled and slowly we have built our position. In those days we struggled a lot. Those minus points should not be there for my daughter. Now we give her the choice of what to study and to what level.*

This father felt that the marriage market had changed in the past ten years from an emphasis on family background to an emphasis on education to the extent that it would be difficult to find a middle-class husband for a poorly educated girl. This Riversdale father believed that "poor to middle class people" may still have to give less education to their daughters because of the high dowry needed for more educated husbands, but he does not need to worry about such things because he is upper middle-class and so can afford whatever his daughter needs.

Many people highlighted the importance of education for a girl's ability to secure a good husband. For example, a St Catherine's mother told me:

These days even for marriages an engineer wants to marry an engineer. A software engineer wants to marry another software engineer. They should have the same education if they are in the same family. They'll see someone who's not educated as a little low.

However, a good husband, a husband worthy of such an educated girl, was known to be expensive and, if the girl was too highly educated, hard to find. A 46-year-old upper middle-class Riversdale teacher told me she would not prevent her adult daughter from doing extensive postgraduate study but it would bother her because she would feel that this would make it more difficult for her daughter to find a suitable (i.e., even more educated) "life partner". A number of people suggested that if a girl had a good job, her salary might be seen as an alternative to dowry for some potential in-laws. Some

St Catherine's parents had not begun saving for their daughters' dowries, instead investing all they could in education. They hoped that their educated, earning daughters would not have to pay dowry or that these daughters would be able to pay the dowry themselves. This was a risk, though, and it was not difficult to understand why Srinu hoped his daughter would stop studying soon.

Although both upper and lower middle-class families expressed concerns about the possibility that their college-going daughters might experience sexual harassment or voluntary but dishonourable (sexual) romantic liaisons, wealthier parents were in a better position to deal with the sexual risks of educating girls. Not only were pre-marital relationships more acceptable among upper sectors of the middle class (see Chapter 7), but wealthier parents were also better able to 'protect' their daughters by providing private transportation.

Several scholars of South Asia have described concerns that (over)educated girls are liable to overstep the boundaries of their roles as daughters, wives and daughters-in-law (Mankekar 1999; Still 2007; 1972). For example, in Shimla, Vatak's (1972: 78) informants constructed a stereotype of educated girls as incompetent and reluctant housewives, and the young Hindu men interviewed by Derné in Benaras in 1991 "blamed modern education for encouraging women to challenge their husbands' authority and insist on moving freely outside the home" (Derné & Jadwin 2007: 51). My participants expressed similar concerns and constructed comparable stereotypes, but they did not blame female education for such things. They blamed 'earning'. While women in paid employment were perceived as potential threats to social harmony, education was accepted as occasionally risky but fundamentally good. This attitude was particularly clear in informants' accounts of families that had failed to educate their daughters properly.

During my time at St Catherine's I heard numerous rumours about girls who had been married off immediately after completing their tenth class. Usually it was not just conservative parents who were to blame – either there was no money for education or the girl was performing badly in exams and further education was seen as a waste. The parents in these stories were always portrayed as overly conservative, lower class and backward, and people made an effort to distance themselves from them. It was clear that such an early marriage and early termination of education were not prestigious.

The above discussion has shown why educating girls is prestigious in middle-class Hyderabad, but also how it is that parents can incur very high costs in the process. Parents appeared to feel genuinely that neither sons nor daughters should be denied the opportunities for success that education provided. However, parents with significant financial constraints weigh the prospect of a high-paying job and a well-educated spouse against the possibilities that their daughters will be housewives, that they will not be able to pay the dowry required for a more educated husband and that their daughters may enter into damaging relationships. Wealthy parents did not have to make these choices and so did not hesitate to educate their children equally. They were, however, more

likely to worry about a son than a daughter failing in school, for the familiar reason that it was not compulsory for women to earn.

Sylvia Vatuk (1972: 78) has argued that the high level of education reached by most girls in the areas of Meerut she studied was largely a result of the demand for educated women as brides for white-collar young men (see also Jeffery and Jeffery 1996: 157). The same cannot be said of suburban middle-class Hyderabad where girls are educated for a number of other reasons including the very real possibility that they may enter paid employment. Nevertheless, if a girls' education was perceived to be a threat to her ability to marry well (by making her more qualified than available or affordable potential grooms), the other benefits of education were sidelined in favour of the marriage that would enable her to fulfil her ultimate duties as a woman – those of wife and mother.

Conclusion

When I asked informants whether men and women have equal status in Hyderabad today, answers were mixed. Some spoke enthusiastically of the significant increases in freedom experienced by women in the 'new India'.

My mother had no job, no freedom, financial freedom, no education, she spent a suppressed life. From our generation we are going to colleges and we are earning, getting jobs and to some extent financial freedom we got. Now next generation to me are getting so much freedom. Almost all girls are going to colleges. In our generation only 20 to 30 per cent were going to colleges. Now almost all are doing some jobs, whatever is suitable for them. Even in part-time jobs also they are doing and paying their fees. Now girls are self-dependent* (Middle middle-class female St Catherine's teacher).

Others were less optimistic, stating that equality between the sexes would not be achieved for many years due to the inertia of 'Indian tradition'. Gender relations, they reasoned, were part of the culture and thus could not (and for some informants should not) be revolutionized.

This chapter has illustrated that significant changes over the past generation in the educational and employment opportunities available to women in these suburban middle-class families have not led to major changes in ideas about women's roles – their primary responsibilities remain domestic. The image of the post-liberalization new Indian woman that appears in advertisements on television (Mankekar 1999) is a product of, and in turn encourages, women's entry into the public realm. The notion that women should be excluded from the public domains of education and employment has been delegitimized as 'backward' and as a threat to the nation's development, such that some openness to female education and employment appeared integral to informants' self-presentation as open-minded, progressive and, therefore, 'respectably middle-class'. However, within informants' talk, women's entry into the public realm had to be 'earned' through exemplary performance of domestic roles, or the acquisition and display of other forms of capital, economic and social, that act as cultural legitimizers. 'Open-mindedness' has to be supported, then, by performance of 'Indian' respectability in other arenas, or through high status occupation and other signs of wealth.

Of particular concern in this chapter has been the intersection of gender and class inequalities. Lower middle-class females are more likely than their upper middle-class peers to have their education terminated due to financial constraints and their work viewed as dishonourable due to its perceived necessity. Women with low economic, social and cultural capital did not have overt symbols of class status that would allow their respectability to be assumed. Their only hope of cultural legitimacy was through strict adherence to the roles of ideal wife and mother.

Respectability, then, is a resource in both class and gender status games. It is through performance of feminine respectability that women construct and communicate their middle-class status. In this context it might be useful to think of feminine respectability as a form of cultural capital that enables women to reproduce their class status through marriage. This chapter highlights the fact that men and women reproduce their class status in very different ways as the value of certain forms of capital and their ability to be converted into other forms depends on a person's gender. However, it should be recognised that gender is as foundational a form of status as class and, accordingly, that it is equally the case that middle-class respectability functions as a form of capital through which women construct themselves as 'proper' rather than gender-deviant women.

6

From Respect to Friendship in Marriage

Anuradha is a handsome, shy, upper middle-class Riversdale teacher in her forties. She had an arranged marriage at the age of 21 and now has a daughter studying engineering and a son in junior college. Her husband works as a civil engineer in a distant part of Andhra Pradesh and often goes months without visiting. Anuradha told me that she is quite open-minded, but her husband is very conservative. I sensed a sadness in Anuradha over the lack of compatibility and closeness between her and her husband, and got the impression that she was somewhat envious of the close friendship her daughter had with a male friend. In a subsequent interview Anuradha told me that her generation had had 'attractions' when they were young, but could not express their feelings or talk to anyone about it. I was struck by the lack of emotion she described in relation to her wedding:

Actually to say I didn't expect anything. It's some ritual going to happen... expectations I didn't have. I didn't feel disappointed. So when I went there what was told to me, 'OK, this is my duty; I need to do it.' That's all I felt. 'This is what is expected from me. I have to do it.'

This sense of resignation and duty seemed to characterize her married life. She thought that her daughter's generation had a much better chance of finding happiness in marriage founded on equality and understanding:

AG: Do you think there will be more differences in the relationships between husbands and wives in your children's generation?

Anuradha: Yes. It will be more open. Then there will be again more equality between husband and wife and they give the space to each other.

AG: Do you ever wish that you were part of your daughter's generation and you could have that kind of marriage?

Anuradha: Ya. Surely [laughs]

AG: Do you think if you were your daughter's age now you would go for a love marriage or an arranged marriage?

Anuradha: An understandable marriage. Whether it was an arranged marriage... I wouldn't go against my parents. I would tell them if I was interested in one boy and take their permission. Try to make them understand what I feel.

Ramya, an upper middle-class college student and cousin of a Riversdale student, was determined not to have the kind of marriage her parents had. She presented her parents as incompatible and their marriage as loveless, and attributed this primarily to the fact that their marriage had been arranged. Ramya estimated that 95 per cent of young people are involved in pre-marital courtship relationships, and noted that many are sexually active. She interpreted this change from the past as young people's reaction to their parents' relationships. Her generation, she noted, will not be distressed or angered by dating and love marriages among their children. I asked Ramya why so many people are still having arranged marriages when pre-marital relationships are so

common. She responded that, at the end of the day, many cannot bear to defy their parents. Love marriages often result in a termination of relationships with parents, so most young people give in and allow their marriages to be arranged.

At the time of our interview, Ramya was involved in a secret romantic relationship with a young man whom she had met through mutual friends. She said that they were attracted to each other when they first met, but were not sure of their love for each other. They spent several months getting to know each other, and only started to think of themselves as a couple when they were sure that they wanted to marry each other. Her boyfriend, Phani, was a successful young professional, and thus a good match in class terms. He was, however, from a poor rural family, and his caste was much lower than Ramya's. Ramya was sure her father would never agree to the match because he has 'caste feelings' and because of the poverty of Phani's family. Ramya told me that she and Phani had spent the night together at a resort just outside the city a few times but had not had sex. She said she would never have spent the night with Phani unless she was convinced that they were going to get married. I asked her how her mother would feel about all of this and she said she cannot bear to think about it. From my own discussions with Ramya's mother, I was fairly certain that she knew about her daughter's romantic relationship, but did not wish to acknowledge it.

The contrast between the relationships of Anuradha and Ramya is one example of a broader, and perhaps more subtle, shift in attitudes toward pre-marital affairs and romantic love as a basis for marriage. As the discussion below will illustrate, not all (or even most) arranged marriages are loveless, and dating does not appear to be as common as Ramya suggested. Yet it does appear that love is increasingly approached as a primary purpose of marriage, and in some cases a precondition for marriage. In this chapter I describe these changes in attitudes toward marriage as a part of an increasing idealization of 'companionate marriage', in which emotional closeness is seen as both the foundation and the goal of marriage, and thus the primary basis on which to judge its suitability and success. Changing ideas about what is important in marriage have led to increased involvement of young people in choosing their own spouses. I argue, however, that the emphasis on equality in discourses of marital change has not resulted in significantly more equitable power sharing in marriage. Instead, female adjustment and male authority are expected and legitimized through the construction of the loving and unbreakable family as the core strength of 'Indian culture'.

Companionate Marriage Ideals

Lawrence Stone's (1990) account of family life in eighteenth-century England outlines perhaps the earliest emergence of companionate marriage as a cultural ideal. Although the transition has been shown to be far from the unilinear evolutionary schema portrayed by Stone (MacFarlane 1979), his core arguments remain largely accepted (Berry & Foyster 2007). According to Stone, a number of trends including the rise of the pursuit of individual happiness as an ideal and the Romantic

movement's encouragement of more openly emotional involvement in family relationships, led to a view of romantic love "as a respectable component of marital strategy and married life" (1990: 267). An increasing emphasis on self-realization and pleasure (rather than survival, social reproduction and fulfilment of kin obligations) led young people to choose their own spouses on the basis of compatibility of personality (1990: 392). Less formal husband-wife relations emerged in response to a greater sense of equality and sharing (ibid.: 329). Considerable efforts were made to improve the quality and quantity of female education among the upper classes so that women could be better companions and housewives, which in turn led to their greater involvement in spouse selection and family decision making (ibid.: 358-9). This new form of marriage was, however, less stable. Removal of external economic, social and psychological supports combined with rising emotional expectations from marriage to result in an increase of formal marital separations (ibid.: 397).

A similar transformation of marriage occurred among the colonial Indian middle classes. During this period the (upper-caste) middle classes began to distance themselves from pre-colonial orthodox upper-caste marriage models in order to claim the moral and cultural superiority central to their class distinction projects. The impetus for social reform among Calcutta's middle classes and elite came from a variety of sources – the rational scepticism that arose from Western education, exposure to European culture, and a sense of inferiority engendered by the new rulers' continual criticism of Indian society and religion. It was these factors that led the Bengali reformist religious group, Brahmo Samaj, and public figures such as Rammohan Roy and Vidjasagar to address issues of widow remarriage, polygamy, child marriage and women's education (Raychaudhuri 2000: 367-68; Chatterjee 1993: 116; Kumar 1993: 8-9). A change in the character of marriage emerged not only in response to reform movements, but also as a result of changing household structures as young men left their village homes along with their wives to take advantage of new job opportunities in the colonial bureaucracy. Without the supervision of elders, couples were less likely to observe strict rules of spousal avoidance (Raychaudhuri 2000: 369) and more likely to seek forms of companionship in which women were not "simply a passive object who must be abjectly submissive to her husband's will and fancy" (Dubois & Beauchamp 1897: 231). Women began to be educated so that they were better able to communicate with their college-educated husbands and in order to broaden their minds and cure superstition, allowing them to perform their duties as wife and mother efficiently (Raychaudhuri 2000; Kumar 1993: 14). Courtship did not emerge, but prospective couples were increasingly introduced by their parents and asked for their consent. Reflecting on these changes, Raychaudhuri argues that "a new intensity of emotion in the conjugal relationship for which there is little precedent in the pre-modern past" had become a part of middle-class Bengalis' life experience (2000: 373). Although marriage practices continued to comply with the patriarchal system and caste-community concerns, by the beginning of the twentieth century romantic love had become an established ideal among the educated middle classes (see also Orsini 2006: 30-34; Lukose 2009: 97).

The changes described above were confined to a small sector of India's old, educated and professional middle classes. A number of ethnographic accounts indicate that the patrilineal joint family model of marriage persisted as a cultural norm well beyond the colonial period. Uberoi (2009: 30) describes this model as including a privileging of the parent-child bond over that between husband and wife, and understatement of the marital bond in public. She states that the relationship between husband and wife is seen as one governed by notions of duty and characterized by affection and respect, as well as protection and service, rather than romantic love and sexual passion (ibid.: 121). Similar ideals can be seen in Seymour's (1999: 59) account of 1960s Bhubaneswar, Orissa, where love was seen as a natural outcome of certain relationships, and not as something inspired by a unique connection between individual personalities. A married couple were expected to fall in love gradually, through co-habitation and the production of children (ibid.: 273). The intensive and exclusive love of the Western romantic tradition was seen as "a dangerous individualistic emotion", and instead a form of 'relational love' based on familial interdependence and duty was preferred (ibid.: 85). In her 1980s re-study, informants reported a rise of love marriages, but continued to distrust such unions. Trawick (1990: 94, 97), writing about a Tamil Brahmin family, similarly asserts that love in India is supposed to grow slowly, by habituation, and that love between a husband and wife should be kept hidden.

A number of studies have drawn attention to a widespread contemporary embrace of companionate marriage ideals in response to recent integration in a capitalist industrialized economy and resultant structural and cultural changes: decreases in men's and increases in women's economic power, the transformation of the household from primarily a site of production to primarily a site of consumption, increases in neolocal residence, rising age at first union, longevity gains, fertility decline, increased access to education and the emergence of the individualized self (Hirsch 2003: 13, 179; Hirsch & Wardlow 2006; Cole & Thomas 2009). For example, Jane Collier (1997) describes a shift "from duty to desire" in marriage in a western Andalusian village as discourses of personal choice, romantic love and partnership have replaced discourses of social obligation, status concerns and patriarchal authority. Jennifer Hirsch (2003: 81) describes "a transition toward relationships in which the ties that bind are perceived to be primarily those of affection, rather than obligation" among Mexicans in El Fuerte, Degollado, and Atlanta. Laura Ahearn similarly reports that rural Nepalis who had previously viewed marriage as "a union based merely on economics, procreation, convenience, obedience, or momentary urges" (2001: 257) were in the 1990s expressing "a desire to find a 'life friend' who would enable them to have a companionate marriage" (ibid.: 70). Such changes have led some scholars to assert that companionate marriage has become a global ideal in recent decades (Hirsch & Wardlow 2006). If this is the case, we might expect to see a second, contemporary rise of companionate marriage ideals among India's new middle classes, amongst whom many of the structural and cultural changes described above can also be observed.

Accounts of marriage in contemporary middle-class India do indeed describe such ideals. Writing on middle-class Kerala, Lukose argues that “increasingly arranged marriages and the discourses and practices that surround them are interwoven with the idioms and repertoires of the modern romantic ideal” (2009: 105) as young people attempt to inject some sense of choice and individuality into matrimonial processes (ibid.: 128). Ethnographers report the emergence of vocabulary associated with companionate marriage, such as ‘soul mate’ (Donner 2008: 65), increasing concern about ‘compatibility’ and ‘chemistry’ in arranging a match (Kapur 2010: 55; Donner 2008: 73; van Wessel 2001: 180-84), and prioritising of the marital bond over that between a son and his parents (van Wessel 2001: 147-48). This leads Donner (2006: 66) to assert that “the ideal of companionate marriage has been wholeheartedly embraced”. Fuller and Narasimhan (2008: 752) agree that in the Indian middle classes “a form of companionate marriage created through arrangement has become the modern ideal”.

In my own research it was clear that middle-class Hyderabadis value companionship and romantic love in marriage. Informants frequently placed romantic love at the centre of their accounts of their marital relations. Several teachers described their early interactions with their parentally chosen spouses as a process of courtship or falling in love. For example, an upper middle-class teacher at Riversdale, originally from Delhi, told me that growing up she had always known that she would not fall in love as her parents would not approve of her initiating a relationship of her own. But once her parents had selected a boy for her, she started loving him. She recounted how, in the ten months of her engagement, she and her future husband had spoken every evening on the phone, and had tried to sneak moments alone on chaperoned outings. Like the middle-class young people studied by Katherine Twamley (2010) in Baroda, my participants viewed their married relationships as romantic and represented their engagement period as a safe parent-sanctioned space for romantic ‘courtship’. This supports Uberoi’s (2009: 218) observation that parents are increasingly willing “to allow and encourage the couple to gradually ‘fall in love’ through a series of carefully monitored meetings, outings, and dates, *after* a parentally-arranged but mutually consensual engagement”.

While romantic love in marriage was clearly important to participants, it was less clear whether this was a new development. One could perhaps view the increasing popularity of wedding anniversary celebrations and rising divorce rates (Kapur 2010: 51) as indicative of the greater importance attached to romantic companionship in marriage (both as a cause for celebration and, when absent, a reason for dissolution). These, however, can be more concretely linked to a rising consumer culture and increasing financial independence of women. While these phenomena have contributed to the rise of companionate marriage ideals elsewhere, it cannot be assumed that they have done so in Hyderabad. To understand the changing emotional character of marriage, it is therefore necessary to turn to participants’ accounts of marriage.

Participants' definitions of a good marriage and their impressions of how marriage was changing varied greatly. Broadly speaking, participants described a transition from marriage characterized by hierarchical notions of respect to an egalitarian friendship model of marriage:

St Catherine's teacher1: Our parents got child marriages so they didn't know about love.
St Catherine's teacher2: They gave respect. Love means expecting the other person to do things for you. In child marriages they don't know love, they know respect. They thought 'My husband is doing more hard work for me and my children so I must give respect. If he is not there, I am not there'.
St Catherine's teacher3: Husband thinks 'I am here to serve her' and wife thinks 'I am here to serve him'. They don't think like that anymore ...
AG: Do you think your grandparents loved each other?
St Catherine's teacher3: They cared each other.
St Catherine's teacher1: Care, respect.*

Actually the love is a bit different nowadays than before ... in the past the love had lot of respect, OK? Loving means there was a lot of respect for each other. Not for each other, means wife for the husband, respect for the husband and many things like they would understand each other's things without saying even, things like that. And now it's more open and more friendly, kind of (Female software worker, 25-30, inter-caste love marriage).

Before it was like, you know, a responsibility with affection and other things, also compromization, all those things. Nowadays it is more of a friendly relationship and then love and affection and then compromization comes a little bit I feel like there it used to be marriage and then they start to get to know each other and they start respecting each other and then loving each other; it starts from respect and then love. And nowadays it's just casual. It's like a friendship, more of friendship rather than love and affection (Female Riversdale teacher, 40s, arranged marriage, divorced).

This change was said to be accompanied by a greater openness in regard to expressing one's love, in marriage as well as in other relationships, for example by holding hands and using the English phrase, 'I love you'.³⁰

Informants were in agreement about a transition from respect to friendship and a greater openness in expressing love physically and verbally, but they differed in their evaluations of the effect that this has had on the emotional character of marriage. While a number of people said 'love and affection' and 'understanding' have always been and still are a part of Indian marriages, others described a decline in these emotions among young couples less willing to compromise than in the past. A young, recently married St Catherine's teacher, said that she had observed the love between her parents and bases herself on them. In particular, she tries to emulate the way they cooperate, but finds this difficult as 'ego problems' are more prevalent in her generation. She felt that as her parents had been married for thirty years they must love each other more than she and her husband do.

³⁰ Although I did not ask directly and so cannot be sure, I do not think that informants would say 'I love you' in Telugu. It seemed to be a distinctly English phrase and was often said in an exaggeratedly dramatic joking tone. For example, one teenage girl I knew well had a habit of calling out to a family member, leaving a long pause and then exclaiming, 'I looove you!'.

In this model, the measure of a good marriage is its durability and practices that contribute to this durability, such as willingness to compromise, are positively valued. People who subscribed to this view asserted that there is less love and understanding in contemporary marriages because young people have 'ego problems' which lead to higher rates of divorce and separation. They talked about love in terms of support and fulfilment of duties. For example, a Riversdale father described the 'love' between himself and his wife in this way: "By taking care of the children, by providing all the facilities to maintain the house I show my wife that I love her. Whenever I feel ill she takes care of me. She never ignores what I say. She always supports me"⁷¹. Women talked about showing their love for their husbands by cooking for them and by agreeing with them.

People who believed there had been a positive change in the emotional character of marriage saw more equitable power relations and labour division as positive signs of partnership and friendship, which were in turn interpreted as indicative of greater understanding and intimacy. People who subscribed to this view talked positively about how much 'closer' and more 'open' their relationships were than those of their parents. They described husbands showing their love for their wives by 'giving importance' to them, i.e., taking their opinions seriously. Some people supported their arguments for greater love in contemporary friendship marriages by referring to the increased intimacy that was possible in nuclear families, as opposed to joint or extended family households.

Two quite different ideas about what constitutes a good marriage are evident in these narratives – respect, duty, compromise and durability versus equality, openness and friendship. It is tempting to assume that these different viewpoints represent a change in marital values over time from respect to friendship or duty to desire, but these ideas were neither mutually exclusive nor could they be attributed to specific groups. Participants who valued compromise and durability in marriage were not on the whole older, poorer or more recently urban than those who valued equality and friendship. Many in fact subscribed to both perspectives – they valued the increased equality of marriage, but worried that this had gone too far and was undermining the durability of marriage. As a young female recently married Riversdale teacher explained:

Now they are sharing their feelings with each other and telling each other what they want to see in their husband or wife. With open heart they are sharing their feelings. In the past they had too many children so there was no time to share their feelings. These days if you see software people they also don't have much time but in the weekends they share their feelings with each other. These changes are good. But egos have also increased. In that generation women used to listen to their husbands, but now they are thinking in their own way and doing in their own way. This is bad but sharing feelings is good.*

The co-existence of these different values is also evident in Priya's opinions about changing marital relations. Priya, a staff member at Riversdale, told me that at the time of her marriage, all marriages were considered 'good'. People assumed their parents had made a good match and their job was to make it work. She suggested that the measure of a good marriage was staying together and supporting each other, no matter what. However, she also placed importance on emotional intimacy.

Priya said that previously people believed women were only good for cooking and making their husbands happy. Her grandmother “only knew cooking” and nobody would ever have expected her to have an equal friendship relationship with her husband. Her mother had known more. She did the household shopping herself using an allowance from Priya’s father. These additional responsibilities had resulted in a more equal, closer relationship. Now Priya is educated and makes decisions for herself and for her family. She believes that with every generation there is an increase in the education and power of women and this leads to greater equality and closeness in their relationships with their husbands. She talked about the lack of privacy in joint families and said that in her parents’ generation “They don't know what is love”.

This suggests that the importance attached to friendship, equality and an emotional intimacy achieved through sharing of ‘feelings’ has not *superseded* the value attached to respect, compromise and durability in marital relations, but rather has come to exist *alongside* these values. Participants’ narratives of their love for their husbands and wives, their anniversary celebrations and the importance they attached to friendship and sharing feelings in marriage are all strongly indicative of a form of marriage that can be described as companionate. This has not been an iconoclastic change, however. In middle-class Hyderabad “companionate marriage has grown into prominence as a *part* of the repertoire of concepts on which people draw when crafting their complicated lives” (Hirsch & Wardlow 2006: 6, my emphasis). A desire for intimacy in marriage has moved from the position of semi-submerged ‘alternative discourse’ to centre stage among the middle classes, but this discourse is in constant dialogue with other ideas about the function of marriage.³¹

Love, Arranged, Love-cum-Arranged

Discussions of companionate marriage around the world have focused on issues of spouse selection, with the contention being that a marriage based on intimate and private love requires a personality compatibility. This compatibility is in turn generally seen to require self-selection of one’s spouse. In India, scholars have noted that despite increased importance attached to romantic love, arranged marriages in which parents play the primary role in choosing the spouse are still the norm. According to Henrike Donner (2006: 66) love marriages are seen as “ambiguous” and Fuller and Narasimhan (2008) write that love marriage “definitely has not” become the modern ideal, except in a small ‘progressive’ segment. These scholars report that new ideas about marriage have, however, resulted in the greater involvement of young people in choosing their spouse. In this section I demonstrate that this appears to be the case in middle-class Hyderabad as well, but with perhaps a stronger trend towards self-chosen spouses than has been previously documented.

³¹ I am paraphrasing Parry (2001: 816) here, who has made similar comments about ‘the upper echelons of the industrial working class’. See also Srivastava (2007: 274-5) for a discussion of the fact that old models of marriage are not replaced by new models of romantic love and sexual self-fulfilment but exist alongside them.

The most widespread change in spouse selection practices among India's middle classes has been the increased involvement of young people in the arranged marriage process. Like the middle-class members of a Tamil Brahmin sub-caste studied by Fuller and Narasimhan (2008), my informants recognized that they could not force their children to marry and expected young people to be involved in a process of selection in which individual characteristics such as educational qualifications, employment and personality are the principal criteria.³² Marriages in which the two people involved did not see each other before their wedding day were almost unheard of. Instead, young people were given the opportunity to meet prospective spouses and decide for themselves whether they thought the marriage would work and whether they would be happy together.³³

The marriage arrangements of Padma's two daughters provide an interesting example of parent-child cooperation. Padma, a middle middle-class teacher at St Catherine's sat beside her daughters when they were in their second year of their BTech degrees, and together they arranged their marriages through a website called *bharatmatrimony.com*. They looked for husbands from educated families who had a Master of Science as a minimum qualification, and were based in the United States.³⁴ The families of the boys they found were still living in Andhra Pradesh and they were able to arrange for the prospective spouses to meet each other and decide whether to go ahead with the marriage. At the time of my interview with Padma, both daughters were reported to be happily married and living in America.

The increasing involvement of young people in choosing their spouses has resulted in a significant blurring of the boundaries between a love marriage and an arranged marriage in middle-class India (Fuller & Narasimhan 2008; Donner 2008: 80). My participants described at least three different types of marriage: love, in which the couple met and fell in love without parental involvement and then declared their intention to marry to the parents; love-cum-arranged, in which the young couple met, fell in love and then *asked* for parental approval after which the marriage was arranged according to conventional rules; and arranged, in which the couple were introduced by their parents. Two male tenth class Riversdale students illustrated the diversity of marital strategies in their discussion of the types of marriage they would like to have:

Student1: I would go for a love marriage, but I would convince my parents why my love is true. It would be love-cum-arranged. Arranged is not the word. My love marriage would be accepted by my parents. It's not that if I love someone truly I would leave them. At the same time I won't want to run away and marry. My parents, I'm sure they would understand.

Student2: Arranged marriage is also a kind of love marriage where they get you kind of matches and if you don't like one of the matches it is obvious that you are not going to marry

³² See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the role of caste in spouse selection.

³³ See Grover (2011) for a discussion of greater importance attached to feelings and emotions as precursors for marriage without an increased acceptance of love marriage or concern for the future happiness of the young people in the arrangement process. Grover's research, conducted among low-caste residents in a Delhi slum, suggests that the trends described by Fuller and Narasimhan (2008), Donner (2002; 2008), Twamley (2010), van Wessel (2001) and me are a *middle-class* phenomenon.

³⁴ These were the characteristics Padma told me she was looking for. I did not press her for details of other characteristics such as caste.

her. If you see some girl, you fall in love with her, then they get matches for you, you fall in love with that match, it's obvious that you are going to marry her. So arranged can also be a kind of love marriage.

Like Margit van Wessel's (2001: 180-81) middle-class informants in Baroda, almost all unmarried young people I spoke to expressed a desire to 'know' their spouse before marriage. They wished to 'understand' them and assess compatibility for themselves. All said that they would not marry without their parents' approval, but they differed in the level of involvement they wished to have in the selection process with roughly equal numbers opting for love-cum-arranged (i.e. self-initiated) and arranged (parent-initiated).

Although marriages in which young people were consulted as part of the process of arrangement were most common and most widely accepted, participants described love(-cum-arranged) marriages in which the young people met, fell in love and then sought the approval of parents as significantly more common than in previous years. A young male professional told me that now "everyone" is choosing his or her own partner because they all think they are unique and special and want to marry someone they understand and love. A more reasoned evaluation was provided by a St Catherine's father, who estimated that love(-cum-arranged) marriages are new and thus tend to attract a lot of attention, but in fact only constitute about 10 per cent of marriages.

This increase in love and love-cum-arranged marriages was believed to be both a product and a cause of decreasing societal disapproval:

It's changing. In the past women who had love marriages would be looked down upon because they feel the girl will be of a doubtful character. They'll think she might have roamed around with so many boys before sticking onto the one. Nowadays people don't mind. They are becoming more broad-minded* (Riversdale mother, 37, arranged marriage).

We were four girls and two boys so my parents thought if the elder one goes for love marriage, those who come to see the other three girls [with an eye to marrying them] will have some [negative] feeling that the elder one went for love marriage, but in the present situation if a sister marries by love nobody will care about it (St Catherine's mother, 30s, arranged marriage).

The decreased ability of parents to prevent their children from marrying against their will was also mentioned by several people. Informants reasoned that in the past parents had more children and so were more willing to 'lose' a child by ostracizing those who refused to marry according to parental wishes. Now that small families are the norm, parents are more willing to compromise.

Among my informants arranged marriages by far outnumbered love marriages. Many had, however, found their own spouses and all had close family members who had done so. In some cases these marriages were barely distinguishable from arranged marriages. For example, a Riversdale teacher and her husband had asked their parents to arrange their marriage, but nobody outside the immediate family knew about this. This informant described keeping her 'love' marriage a secret from her daughter, in case her daughter used it as justification for a pre-marital affair of her own. Uma, also a teacher at Riversdale, told me that her daughter had met an IT professional through the

internet, who then asked Uma and her husband for their daughter's hand in marriage. Uma's husband said there was no reason to reject this boy as "they are our people, same caste and all", and because he "looks good". The couple are to be married next year.

Other couple-initiated relationships were more disruptive, particularly when they crossed caste boundaries. A Riversdale teacher's neighbour had proposed to her after they had exchanged letters for some time. Their parents were not happy when they learnt of their intentions, in part because of the difference in caste (Brahmin and Kshatriya), but had eventually agreed to the match. I have already described in Chapter 2 the difficulty Kavya and her husband had in convincing their parents to agree to their inter-caste marriage. Kavya's younger sister, Sahiti, was married in 2010 to a boy she met at university. She was 26 when she married and, although she attributes her late marriage to her postgraduate studies, she and her sister believe that Kavya's inter-caste marriage may well have made it difficult to find a good match using regular methods. Sahiti's husband is also a Brahmin so there was little resistance from the family, but he is from North India and does not speak Telugu. Sahiti told me she thought her parents were not proud of the match for this reason and had avoided telling the rest of the family about it until just before the wedding.

These examples are in alignment with a number of other recent studies showing increasing parental acceptance of 'love' marriages, and a tendency to treat these unions like arranged marriages whenever possible (Donner 2008: 88; Vatuk 1972: 87). Donner (2008: 88) reports that "where couples fall in love with someone from the same caste, community and religious background and insist on marriage, they are more often than not neither marginalized nor forced to elope and do not even have to resort to a civil wedding or feel that they have to pretend that theirs was an arranged marriage". In middle-class Hyderabad this was often possible even when partners were not of the same caste, as long as other important criteria of homogamy, such as education and occupation, were met. As Patricia Uberoi (2009: 25) has written of changing middle-class marriage practices, parents are increasingly willing to "adjust to their children's romantic aspirations" and may agree to arrange a marriage for a child who falls in love with a socially appropriate partner (see also Uberoi 2009: 219). For Hyderabad's middle classes, as for the IT professionals in Bangalore observed by Baas (2007), when 'love' is convenient to the interests of the family, it often leads to a form of (semi-) arranged marriage. Thus, it is no longer the form of spouse selection that confers legitimacy on a marriage, but rather the agreement of the parents (see also van Wessel 2001: 112).

Love marriages nevertheless remain contentious, and not only when caste-boundaries are crossed. My participants, like the Tamil Brahmins studied by Fuller and Narasimhan (2008: 748), reasoned that arranged marriages are more successful because parents are better at choosing spouses for their children. According to participants, young people, in their immaturity, choose spouses based on momentary 'infatuation' and individual desires, and are also liable to being deceived. Parents, on the other hand, have the maturity as well as the relevant knowledge and experience to know that

marriage is a union between two families and would investigate the family background of a potential spouse:

Boys and girls go to college and love a boy or girl without knowing the family background. The boy will say he loves the girl and then suddenly the girl is loving another boy and vice versa. She is saying this boy used to love me and now he loves someone else. He spoilt me and raped me. Nowadays it has become just for timepass and just for fun. Every day we are hearing many types of problems like this. Some people love someone in school then leave them when they go to college. Then they love someone in college but when it comes to marriage maybe parents are not agreeing... Why we are sending them to college and school? To study. So they should study and not bother about love. Parents are bringing them up from childhood. By the marriage time if the child neglect the parents it's not good for the child also. They have to obey the parents. They have to control themselves^T (St Catherine's mother, 34, arranged marriage).

The possibility that even love marriages could involve getting to know the family was not considered because parental disapproval was assumed.

Pre-marital 'love' was generally characterized as a fleeting emotion and thus poorly suited to the permanence of marriage. While 'love' *in* marriage was explained in terms of 'understanding', something that developed over time through cooperation and communication, 'love' *before* marriage was described as 'attraction' and 'infatuation' to emphasize the temporary and physical nature of this feeling:

When no attraction is there, only understanding is there, then love marriage will be successful. Attraction means temporary feeling. They don't know at that age what is good and bad. They feel like getting attracted to somebody^T (Riversdale mother, 40, arranged marriage).

In arranged marriage they check the background, criminal background and property. In love marriage a girl falls in love if he is good looking or speaks a little bit of English^T (St Catherine's father, 40s, arranged marriage).

Teenage 'attractions' were seen as inevitable by informants, but, as Patricia Uberoi (2009: 218) has noted, "in India, romantic love is mostly regarded as a fickle basis for marriage" (see also Donner 2008: 70).

This fickle basis, the unwillingness of such fickle people to compromise in marriage, and the lack of support from parents were all said to contribute to the instability of love marriage:

Maybe there are some of them that are truly in love, but most of the love marriages are failures nowadays ... within one year or two years they are divorcing and easily doing that ... they don't allow their elders also to interfere with these things so they're not able to settle their problems ... Maybe before marriage the love will be like superficial. They don't know each other, like interior of us, how we behave totally (Female Riversdale teacher, 35-40, arranged marriage).

In arranged marriages if there is any problem the parents will help to sort out the problem. In love marriage if any dispute arises they cannot go and support her because they say you made your decision so you have to deal with the problems on your own. When people get love marriage they won't listen to their elders' advice^T (St Catherine's father, 40s, arranged marriage)

If it is arranged marriage, the parents are involved because they have crossed that stage in their lives and can guide them. If it is love marriage the relatives might be against it and the couple

might not have proper support from the family if any problem comes. If they run away from the family to marry they won't have any support at all* (St Catherine's father, 40, arranged marriage).

Informants suggested that if a child chose his or her spouse, he or she was responsible if things went wrong. They argued that it was better if the parents had this responsibility as they would be more likely to intervene if problems arose.

Harshitha, a young St Catherine's teacher, had herself experienced a lack of family support following a love marriage. She met her husband on a bus and married him against her family's wishes. As he drinks and is unable to hold down a steady job, he has been unable to support Harshitha and their three children. She told me that because she had a love marriage she gets no support from her brothers, only from her mother. She explained: "If you have a love marriage you are giving others a chance to say bad things about you."* She said that other men try to take advantage of her assuming that, as she had a love marriage, she might be open to such sexual encounters. Harshitha has friends who had love marriages and are happy, but would not like her daughter to have a love marriage because she feels that if a love marriage fails there is no security provided by family. Nobody suggested that the solution to this problem was greater acceptance and support from parents.

From these narratives, an 'open-minded' middle-class perspective on love marriage emerges quite clearly. Not giving the couple a chance to veto a marriage proposal was constructed as a backward custom in conflict with educated middle-class open-mindedness. The notion that any initiation of contact with the opposite sex was immoral and disrespectful of parents was widely viewed as outdated, and the few who endorsed this idea were among the poorest informants. Like Donner's (2008: 85) middle-class Kolkatan participants, most middle-class people I spoke to in Hyderabad sought "to distance themselves from the selfish guardians and backward practices found in other communities, who by arranging their children's marriages sacrifice the happiness of a son or daughter for material gains." Although some did construct the search for a suitable match as "a crucial parental privilege" (Donner 2008: 65), my informants suggested that they could not reasonably expect their children to share this view.

Nevertheless, almost all parents expressed a preference, like Donner's participants, for arranged marriages for their children as such marriages do not pose any threat to a family's reputation of respectability based on control of female sexuality. Unlike Donner's participants they resolved this not by advocating love marriages for other people's children, but by stressing that parentally arranged marriages are in the best interests of the children. My participants seldom expressed concern that love marriages are cause for tensions between parents and children (cf. Donner 2008: 85), instead focusing on the inevitability of conflict between the young people involved and the greater instability of such marriages. Thus, rising importance attached to friendship and emotional intimacy in marriage has led to the increased involvement of young people in choosing their spouses, but, as durability remains of paramount importance, people continue to place their trust in arrangement rather than

love. While romantic love is increasingly valued in marriage, parents and many young people “want love to be arranged” (Twamley 2010).

However, the reasoning that parents make more sensible choices of spouse leaves room for young people to convince their parents of the prudence of their love. Many people said that they were not completely against love marriage as long as sufficient effort had been made to establish that the prospective spouse was ‘suitable.’ I was told by many participants that in order to make such a decision without too much risk the young couple should be mature and ‘well-settled’ on a respectable path to middle-class status, i.e. have completed their education and found good employment. As the case studies above indicate, increasing numbers of young people are succeeding in convincing their parents of this. Nevertheless, as the following chapter will demonstrate, people were very uncomfortable with the processes that young people, however mature and well-settled, might go through to find a spouse because of concerns about the threat that any hint of active female sexuality might pose to middle-class respectability.

Gender Equality in Marriage

When talking about the changing nature of marriage, middle-class people in Hyderabad almost invariably described a more equitable relationship arising from the greater autonomy of women. The extent of this equality, however, was rather difficult to establish. In Hyderabad, middle-class women’s power in marriage is complex. For example, Yashoda, whose story opens this thesis, is an energetic and dynamic woman, appears to be in charge of the day-to-day running of the household, plays a central role in organising family ‘get-togethers’ and was proudly described by her teenage children, Vamsi and Swetha, as a businesswoman. At a family gathering in which women had to state the ‘plus points’ and ‘minus points’ of their husbands and children, she gave as a plus point for her husband that he lets her do whatever she wants. In contrast to this image of assertive autonomy, Yashoda makes sure she is always home when her husband returns from work so she can serve him his meals and always eats after the rest of the family. Throughout my time in Hyderabad I wondered what to make of the way women seemed to run their households and have clear ideas about what they wanted in life, but also served their husbands and deferred to them in many contexts. At times it seemed that couples sought to exaggerate their equality for the prestige of ‘progressiveness’, but in other situations couples appeared to put on a show of ‘respectable’ male authority and female deference that masked a more equitable sharing of power in private. These tensions were evident in the contradictions in people’s narratives when talking about the head of the family, decision making and the value of female ‘adjustment’.

Several people, mostly among the wealthiest and youngest participants, said that there is no head of their family, or that both husband and wife are head and make decisions together. Two lower middle-class women said they are the heads of their family; one because she is more educated than

her husband and the other because her husband has no interest in running the household. However, most women told me their husbands are the head of the family, giving as reasons their husband's age, greater education, 'exposure' (see Chapter 4) or earnings, as well as 'Indian culture'. A Riversdale housewife said that her husband is the head of the household because he has an income. According to her, giving more importance to husbands is part of Indian culture because they are older and have more responsibilities, and so are the natural head of the family. She explained that in families where the couple earn equally they should be, and are, equal partners, except that "when you call for the head of the family the husband comes. I think it all comes with culture and tradition and all".

Priya, the Riversdale staff member who thought "women are for cooking" and that her parents' generation did not "know what is love", told me that her husband is "100 per cent" the head of their household and had only started to ask for her opinion on things in the last two years. Before then she had not even known how much he earned. She thinks that men should be the head of the household because it is "tradition" and because they have more "exposure" than women. She only argues with her husband in private because if she did so in public it would affect his reputation. When I asked her if there are any situations in which she is the boss, Priya told me that she had made the decision to buy their current apartment and had taken an advance on her salary to buy a car. It was apparent from Priya's account that this level of independence is still far from typical amongst the Hyderabad's middle classes. Priya noted that her husband has been proudly telling his friends that his wife bought him a car. Some friends joked about it and teased him, but many were reportedly impressed and one immediately asked his own wife, 'When are you going to buy me a car?'

Most of the men I interviewed described themselves as deservedly the head of their family. A Riversdale father told me: "I am the head because I am the earning member, because I am a gent in our society, and because I am more exposed to the society, because I have better, more education than my wife. All these things have given me a natural edge for behaving like a head of the family." Another Riversdale father said that the head of a family would be "The person, male, being a male, more age, more experience, more earning, more responsible". He thought women could be the heads of their families if their husbands were lacking the necessary characteristics; for example, if they were uneducated or disabled.

In discussions about marriage a distinction was often made between giving the impression that the husband was in charge in public and a more negotiable power balance in private. This was the clear message of the jokes that a Riversdale teacher posted on Facebook:

Position of a Husband Is just like a Split AC
No matter however Loud he is in the Outdoor
He is designed to remain Silent indoor...

Husband is one who is the head of the family,
but his wife is the neck, and whichever way she turns, he goes.

A young female teacher from St Catherine's told me that men are often only nominally the head of the household and the mother is in fact the head in about 40 per cent of homes. Although several interviewees maintained that they showed respect to their husbands in the same way inside and outside the house, many talked about the importance of showing more respect in public.

It was widely asserted that a couple, particularly the man, would lose respect if they were seen to be arguing in public, and that a woman's submission was necessary to avoid this.

Outside he will be deciding everything ... I'm like a sleeping person over there – I allow him to take the decisions ... I don't interfere maybe because I don't want everybody to gossip on what our relationship is outside ... People will give less respect to my husband if I give him less respect in public (Female Riversdale teacher, 35-40, arranged marriage).

In India we expect obviously this guy is more aged, he is supposed to be more experienced, more balanced, more mature, so when she treats him outside, the community as a whole believes she has to give him due respect. She has to give more respect than in the house ... everybody will be looking at them to see how are they are treating each other ... outside they feel that the boss culture should be there ... otherwise they may feel there is something wrong. If she dominates the guy, though they're very good in their personal life, still people feel there is something wrong. It is still a male dominant society (Riversdale father, 43, arranged marriage).

Parallels with this notion that female deference is something of a formality can be found in other South Asian ethnographies. In rural Haryana, Chowdhry (1994: 276-77) observed that women were reluctant to give the impression of authority and even 'dominant' women conformed to the 'submissive woman' stereotype when in public. Men correspondingly adjusted their behaviour so as not to appear weak. Mandelbaum has similarly noted that women can have influence and power in the domestic sphere, but "rarely exert that influence openly, publicly, or directly" (1988: 19) and are excluded from public affairs.

Many couples I spoke to supported their claim that they were merely maintaining a public appearance of male dominance by explaining how they shared the decision making and management of finances. I was told that in the past women had never left their homes and that men had taken care of all chores, including purchasing vegetables, whereas today middle-class women purchase all household goods and understand banking. In most families I spoke to the woman was in charge of day-to-day household finances. In some cases both husband and wife had bank cards, and in others the wife had an allowance for household expenses and simply told her husband when she needed more money. It is important, however, to differentiate between management and control of domestic finances. As Vatuk (1972: 91-95) points out, budgeting and shopping are forms of work and women's participation in these tasks tell us little about their power to affect household decision-making. As in Vatuk's research, the women I spoke to had fairly exact knowledge about household finances and few wives were altogether excluded from decisions about the use of household resources, but in most cases men maintained primary responsibility for decision making.

Chowdhry (1994) documents a generally accepted view in rural Haryana that women are unfit to give advice. This was not the case in middle-class Hyderabad, where most couples said they made decisions together. However, further probing revealed different understandings of what this entailed. Some, mostly upper middle-class, men and women I spoke to insisted that the woman's opinion was genuinely valued, that she would often make the final decision, and that her husband would not do anything that she strongly disagreed with. In some homes the woman appeared to have considerable power to persuade her husband, but many people appeared to assume that the husband knew best and for them making decisions together meant the husband merely consulted the wife before making the decision himself.

Further evidence that husbands generally had the final word was found in discussions of adjustment. During fieldwork women were often praised for their ability to adjust to new circumstances, such as when moving to a new home after marriage, and mothers expressed concern that their pampered daughters would not be able to make such adjustments, but male adjustment was not discussed. Towards the end of my research I asked people about this directly and they confirmed that adjustment is primarily expected of wives:

AG: Do you think men or women adjust more in marriage?

St Catherine's mother: Wife adjusts more. If a wife adjusts then only a family can lead a good life. If a woman adjusts more than a husband, that life will be much better and good.

AG: Why is it good if the wife adjusts more?

St Catherine's mother: If a wife doesn't adjust then there will be so many quarrels between a wife and husband. It will go till that extent where there will chances of separating and that effect will show on their children also. So it's better if a wife can adjust and sort out the problem.

AG: But why shouldn't the husband be the one to adjust?

St Catherine's mother: Men will not have such type of mentality to adjust. They will have an ego that 'I am a man. I am earning. As I am earning why should I listen to her?' And if she starts saying against him he will become angrier and there will be many quarrels. It is better that she adjusts.^T

In the Indian setup women have to adjust more than they should. ... You are not supposed to raise the voice like ask how and why, and this and that. You just have to close your mouth and keep doing things ... Women adjust more because it's the woman who goes to the man's house after getting married, here. In abroad both come out and set up a home but here it is not that way. She has to go to the husband's place and adjust to the in-laws ... It's predominantly a man oriented society over here. And man has always an upper hand here so man never tries to adjust also. Sometimes if at all it's creating a rift between them and, you know, things are going overboard, perhaps if he's an understanding person then he would try to, but it's generally the woman (Riversdale mother, 37, arranged marriage).

This valorizing of female adjustability is well documented in studies of Indian marriage. Donner (2008: 79) describes the ability to adjust as "a key cultural construct of feminine virtue"; Seymour (1999: 201) reports that in Bhubaneswar in the 1960s and in the 1980s there was an expectation that wives would adapt to a greater extent than their husbands; and Uberoi (2009: 236) asserts that a wife

is expected to “give in gracefully whenever a conflict situation develops, and regardless of the rights and wrongs of the issue at hand”.

When I talked to people about changes in power sharing in marriage, most said that men and women had become more equal as a result of women being more highly educated and earning. Almost everyone thought that these were positive changes, but, along with the negligent working woman (see Chapter 5), the dominant wife was another popular character in tales of the dangers of social change:

AG: Do you think women today are less willing to adjust than they were in the past?

Female Riversdale teacher: *Yes!* The latest relationships I see the ego part of it. They think they're also important, more than their husbands, because they're working and earning more...

AG: Do you think this is a good thing?

Female Riversdale teacher: Not 100 per cent good thing. Maybe they should feel like they're also important, but they should think that because we got married we should be able to adjust with each other learn with each other. Tell him the wrong things, explain him, convince him, but not just simply breaking up and going away.

AG: Do you think this is the reason we are seeing more divorces?

Female Riversdale teacher: Yes, because the ladies are not willing to adjust.

AG: Do you think men or women adjust more in marriage?

Riversdale mother: I think so now men are adjusting more [laughter]. Before women used to adjust more... nowadays you see so many divorce cases because the girls' domination is more. You see so many cases girls dominate ... 'Because education is there, I can do job; I can do my own everything'. Nowadays this is becoming a fashion. Before it used to not be like that. More education for the girl is a problem [laughs, in a manner that seems to acknowledge that this is not a PC thing to say] ...

Riversdale father: That much economical independence is not there at that time so they keeping quiet. Now they are getting more salaries, more salaries. That's why some cases they are not obeying husband

Riversdale mother: Nowadays we are seeing these cases more ... Both earning. Both should have equal. Everything they fight for equal rights. If one don't give respect also they'll fight. They're leading to take divorce and all ... More than men, the lady domination is more now it is becoming.

In many cases the definition of female domination appeared to entail refusal to be dominated by one's husband, rather than any particularly authoritative actions. I was told that when a woman questions why she has to serve her husband this leads to unhappiness in the marriage and sometimes divorce. The clear message of these stories is that women's obedience is necessary to the smooth running of the family and they should not claim equality to the extent of refusing to do what their husbands ask of them. Although a genuinely equal sharing of power was idealized as part of a progressive, open-minded marriage, women were expected to compromise in situations of conflict.³⁵

As mentioned above, men were generally assumed to be the natural head of the family as they are generally older, more qualified and more experienced than their wives. A St Catherine's teacher explained how her husband used this logic when they disagreed: “My husband is very typical. He is friendly with me and shares everything with me. But sometimes he says ‘I am male. I am elder to you.

³⁵ Margit van Wessel (2001: 222) similarly found that although women wanted to work and earn, they expected their husbands to be in charge to prevent ‘ego problems’ coming between husband and wife.

I am an engineer. I have an office job. I have been working for longer than you. So you have to listen to me.” Informants reasoned that if a woman married a man who was ‘inferior’ to her in any way – age, education, job status, exposure – this would lead to difficulties as the man would naturally expect to be the superior member of the partnership: “Suppose the wife is more educated than the husband some proudness will come and this will cause some difficulties between husband and wife. It is better if the wife is less educated than her husband”^T (St Catherine’s mother). Nobody told me that they believed women to be inherently inferior to men, and they tended to associate such ideas with ‘backward’ villagers and the elderly. Sexism of this nature was clearly not seen as compatible with an urban cosmopolitan outlook. Instead, women’s subordination to their husbands was justified by ‘objective’ criteria such as age, qualifications and exposure. Thus women’s subordination was explained as both a product of and a reason for unequal marital matches.

Finally it is necessary to reflect on the differences between lower and upper middle-class approaches to gender equality in marriage. As with attitudes towards educating girls and working women, ideas about the appropriateness of husbands’ domination of their wives varied between upper and lower middle classes. Although there were feisty and submissive women across the income spectrum, lower middle-class men and women were more likely to assume that the husband was better equipped for decision-making and less likely to problematize wives’ subordination. While upper middle-class men and women went to great lengths to convince me that their relationships were genuinely equal or were apologetic when describing their inequality, some lower middle-class men and women described significantly unequal relationships without any indication of concern that they might be seen as politically incorrect or backwards by others. A St Catherine’s teacher in her forties told me that when she gets her salary she puts it in her husband’s hands not only in the interests of family harmony, but also because it is the right thing to do, as her husband is fulfilling all of his responsibilities. She told me that the wife should not be proud that she is earning, and that she would obey her husband in all matters without any question in her mind as to the quality of his decision-making. A software engineer in his twenties from a poor rural family could not conceive of a situation in which his wife would know best:

Research Assistant: Would you expect your wife to give her earnings to you?

Software engineer: Sure! Obviously as a husband I expect to take responsibility for my family. Always a husband wants to take care of his wife and children so he thinks I’ll take that money and use it in a proper way. But I should never restrict her freedom. My wife should tell me what she plans to do with the money and if I think it’s good I will allow it. She should inform me of whatever she is doing. As a husband I should know.

AG: How will you know that what you think is correct and what your wife thinks is not correct?

Software engineer: She’ll tell me what she plans. If I think it is correct I’ll allow it. If she disagrees I won’t stop her from doing it but one day she will come to know that I was correct.*

I did not have sufficient access to participants’ private lives to be able to make claims about actual disparities in marital power-sharing between sectors of the middle class. However, it did appear

to be the case that an ideology of women's inherent inferiority had been delegitimized to a greater extent among the upper middle class. This might be explained in terms of upper middle-class women's greater education and employment levels, which add force to their claims for equality. Another reason may be found in class distinction projects. In lower middle class 'fields' (Bourdieu 1984), 'respectable' stable marriage and 'respectable' clearly demarcated gender roles – authority and earning for men and submissiveness and domesticity for women – are the most legitimate forms of cultural capital as these enable distinction from the vulgarities of low-class femininity and marital relations. In upper middle-class fields, respectability tends to be taken for granted to a greater extent and distinction is sought from the 'conservative' lower middle-class. Thus, while claims of gender equality functions as a form of class distinction, as part of a broader 'open-mindedness' for all sectors of the middle class, such claims have greater 'currency' in upper middle-class fields. While all sectors of the middle class seek a balance between respectability and open mindedness and thus seek to limit female assertiveness, the upper middle class are able to push these limits due to the more assured respectability that arises from their greater distance from poverty.

'Indian' Family Values

Like the transnational IT workers studied by Rahdhakrishnan (2011a: 50), my informants affirmed and reinforced the superiority of their national culture (and thus the need for change to be limited) through discourses of the 'good' Indian family, and suggested that preservation of good families was a primary means for expression of respectable femininity. In doing so they reproduced narratives about the exceptionality of Indian 'family values', indicated by a lack of divorce and extra-marital sex, that date back to the colonial period (Kumar 1993: 25; see also Parry 2001: 783). Although my informants often spoke positively about the respect for elders and ability to compromise learnt through joint family living, they were also critical of the potential for conflict with in-laws and lack of independence in such households. They did not portray the joint family as an ideal (cf. Parry 1979), nor did they associate its disintegration with social degeneration (cf. van Wessel 2001: 20, 135-36, 144-45). Instead it was pre-marital affairs and divorce, perceived to be increasing due to the influence of Western culture, that were presented as posing a grave threat to 'Indian culture'.

According to informants, young Westerners marry without consulting their parents and do not take their parents into consideration when making any decisions. Their marriages are based on lust and as that lust fades and new opportunities for sexual gratification arise, marriages are terminated. Marriages also end in divorce because Westerners are unwilling to adjust even in very trivial matters.³⁶ Informants wanted to know if divorce rates in Western countries were really as high as they had heard they were, and frequently asked why Westerners have so little value for the sacredness of

³⁶ See Donner (2008: 69) for a very similar account of Western relationships from middle-class Kolkata.

marriage. They assumed that the high divorce rate in western countries indicates that divorce is a flippant decision made in response to a minor disagreement:

People in foreign if they marry and they don't like each other they split up and they don't care about the child. For example Diana. Doing things in a hurry without thinking. She came out from a king's family. She should do things in a certain way. She should not cause embarrassment to that family. She should not have split from Charles, 100 per cent.* (Male St Catherine's teacher, 40s, arranged marriage)

When I attempted to explain that in most cases divorce was approached as a serious action to be taken only after a long period of marital discord, people did not appear convinced.

Informants contrasted this image of a self-interested Western system with a picture of stable Indian family life in which divorce had been almost non-existent until recently. Although informants presented this as an issue of national cultural distinction, their notions of 'Indian' marriage drew on a high-caste Hindu picture and ignored the wide acceptance of divorce and remarriage lower down the social hierarchy. Contrary to the image of increasing marital instability presented by middle-class Hyderabadis, Parry (2001: 788) has argued that among Dalit workers at the Bhilai Steel Plant, "a new companionate ideology of marriage and stress on intimacy is accompanied by a decline in divorce ... and by a growth in gender inequality". It is important to remember, therefore, that informants' assertions of 'Indian' marital ideals are very much about caste-class distinctions.

According to informants, 'Indian' family life involves greater love, affection and understanding, and is both inherently morally superior and beneficial for children. For example, an upper middle-class Riversdale teacher told me that "Mutual understanding is much more in India". She said this mutual understanding is what makes Indian marriages endure and is the reason why marriage is so important in India. As proof of the strong bonds between family members in India, participants talked about the difficulty of being away from parents. I was often asked whether I spoke to my parents every day, and when I replied in the negative people explained that this would not be possible in India. Showing evidence of their own superior family love, people told me that they dropped everything to go and care for sick parents and that their parents or children did the same for them. Love was understood and expressed in terms of these strong bonds of mutual support and dependence.

A number of scholars have argued that companionate marriage as both a practice and a discourse is a key resource for building a modern identity. In many contexts, part of companionate marriage's global appeal is its association with modernity (Hirsch & Wardlow 2006: 20) and people seek to distance themselves from certain intimate relations deemed 'primitive' and 'traditional' (Cole & Thomas 2009: 16). A more complex picture emerges in middle-class Hyderabad. My informants did not use the word 'modern' when describing companionate forms of marriage, but did depict more equitable gender relations within marriage as 'progressive' and 'open-minded'. This was contrasted with 'backward' practices of oppressive male domination. Like Hirsch's (2003: 278-80)

participants in Mexico, middle-class people in Hyderabad appeared to consciously deploy a discourse of gender to locate themselves in a moral universe. Unlike Hirsch's participants, they did not locate themselves on a scale of development and enlightenment that mapped neatly onto a conceptual timeline of tradition and modernity. Rather, they sought to maintain the essence of respectable 'Indian' family relations, understood in terms of uniquely strong bonds of love, affection and mutual dependence, while simultaneously endorsing gender equality as a necessary component of an acceptably progressive middle-class identity. Some degree of equality appeared to be necessary in order to claim 'respectable' middle-class status, in contrast to the abusive poor. An even greater degree of equality seemed to enable one to claim status as 'open-minded' and 'progressive', in contrast to the 'conservative' lower middle-class. Yet informants showed considerable resistance to an overly equitable relationship between husband and wife, and framed this resistance in terms of the threat it posed to the stability of marriage, and thus to 'Indian culture'.

The conceptions of the ideal woman expressed by my participants were deeply imbued with ideologies of cultural nationalism. Like Mankekar's (1999: 157) participants in Delhi, participants drew on essentialist discourses of (upper-caste) national culture, and embedded their notions of ideal *Indian* womanhood within the framework of the united family as a symbol of the uniqueness and strength of Indian culture. New roles for women were only condoned insofar as they could be accommodated within this system. The new Indian woman in participants' talk was actively responsible for the preservation of Indian culture through her protection of the family unit from the threat of Western relationship styles. This task was presented as an honour of which women should be proud.

Conclusion

One evening I sat chatting with an upper middle-class 36-year-old St Catherine's mother. She had told me many times before about how she and her husband are friends, equals. I asked her whether she calls her husband *miru* (respectful 'you') or *nuvu* (informal 'you'). She said she calls him *miru*. I asked if he calls her *miru* or *nuvu*. She had a good chuckle and replied that he calls her *nuvu*. It was clear from her tone of voice that she found my question naïve. An upper middle-class 34-year-old Riversdale teacher appeared similarly proud of the egalitarian nature of her marriage. When I asked her how she shows respect for her husband she had to think for a long time before she recalled any examples. Then she smiled and expressed concern about what I would think of her example. She told me that every Friday she does a special *pūja* which involves touching her husband's feet and taking his blessing. "How does your husband show respect to you?" I asked her. "It's the same," she replied and then started laughing. "No, not the same! He wouldn't go down to me [to touch my feet]." Reflecting on common attitudes toward power-sharing in marriage and his own feelings on the matter, a young male lower middle-class teacher at Riversdale, made the following comments:

Riversdale Teacher: Here in Hindu families mostly the husband is older than [the] wife. She knows that he is older than me so whatever he says is correct. That belief is there.

AG: Do you believe this?

Riversdale Teacher: I believe that and sometimes I will also say “I am elder to you. I can think better.” If she gives [a] good suggestion, I will take [it] also. ...

AG: Do you think a woman could be the head of the household?

Riversdale Teacher: Why not? It is not there in my family but I saw two to three families where the father is not strong so the mother takes care. But she never shows that ‘I am the head of the family’ to other people. That is the respect she shows to her husband. That is tradition.*

These examples touch on a number of issues raised in this chapter. I have argued that there has been an increase in the importance attached to romantic love in marriage. The relationship is now conceived as one of partnership, friendship and emotional intimacy *as well as* one of respect, duty and durability. This has contributed to the increased involvement of young people in choosing their spouses. As Hyderabad’s middle-class youth increasingly desire to know and understand the person they marry, many are deciding for themselves who they will marry, or at least making the final choice from a range of parentally selected options.³⁷ These new practices can be explained in terms of a number of mutually reinforcing structural changes – rising levels of female education, women’s increased involvement in paid employment, urban rather than agricultural employment, the family’s transition from a site of production to one of consumption, decline of joint family households and declining fertility rates. Although arranged marriage remains the norm and respect and durability remain centrally important marital values, a discourse of marital partnership, friendship and understanding has become a key means of performing and claiming status as a progressive or open-minded middle-class person.

Such changes have enabled women to negotiate greater levels of autonomy and agency in their married lives. In the privacy of their own homes, women had capacity for persuasion and, in some contexts, were able to exert real power. In public, however, men and women adhered to norms of female deference. Wives’ education, ‘exposure,’ age and employment were inferior to those of their husbands, and this asymmetry was considered to be essential to a ‘good match’. Reflecting on the material presented in the previous chapter, it is evident that although models of femininity that encourage assertiveness and independence can be found in education and the workplace, in the home a model of submission still prevails. Thus, in middle-class Hyderabad, as in other parts of the world where people are recently integrated in urban capitalist economies (Cole & Thomas 2009: 25; Collier 1997), the ideal of companionate marriage is embraced as part of broader efforts to achieve gender equality, but with disappointing results. Women’s assertiveness in the home and their equality with their husbands was expected to be limited:

³⁷ One aspect of parentally selected spouses I have not touched upon is cross-cousin marriage. There was some discussion among informants of the need to avoid such marriages because of genetic defects and smaller families were reducing the likelihood of an appropriate cousin. Cousin marriages do still occur among the middle-class, but appeared to be uncommon.

It is good if a woman thinks for herself but it should not cross the limits. If her husband is telling correct and she is not listening to him that is not good* (Female Riversdale teacher, 27, arranged marriage).

Most of this generation are very friendly with their husbands, but this friendliness should not cross limits. Importance should still be given to the husband (Female St Catherine's teacher, 40s, arranged marriage).

It is clear that “culturally valued authority continues to reside with the man; both the woman who usurps it and the man for allowing her to do so are ridiculed and condemned” (Chowdhry 1994: 277; see also van Wessel 2001: 204-6; Liddle & Joshi 1986: 182). Women are held responsible for the success or failure of their marriages. They can *hope* for a husband who is willing to share power, but they cannot *demand* equality. Men determine the marital style with which their wives will negotiate and power is the husband's to give or take as he sees fit. If ‘love’ marriages are indeed as unstable as informants claimed them to be, this may reflect the difficulty of sustaining the more egalitarian nature of courtship relations in a form of marriage in which patriarchy is constructed as essential to ‘Indian’ respectability.³⁸

Following Mankekar (1999: 151-4), I argue that while increasing involvement of the ‘new Indian woman’ in the public spheres of education and paid employment has enabled her to assert herself *in the service of* her family, her ability to assert herself *within* her family remains severely constrained. Although, in middle-class Hyderabad, it is possible to be both ‘open-minded’ and ‘respectable’, a woman's respectability is contingent upon her performance of domestic duties and feminine adjustment, and her open-mindedness must not infringe on these established roles. Open-mindedness must therefore exist within the limits of ‘traditional Indian’ ideals of womanhood and marital roles. The most equitable gender relations were therefore only available to those who had the education, wealth and occupational status to ‘prove’ their actions were founded in ‘open-mindedness’ rather than simple deviance and low-class-caste lack of respectability. This suggests that the balancing acts that so many scholars have associated with postcolonial middle classes are primarily performed by women (Radhakrishnan 2011a: 147-8).

The reasons for women's apparent complicity in this system are complex. Following Bourdieu (2001), it can be argued that ideas about men as ‘naturally’ better suited to paid employment and leadership are a form of ‘misrecognition’ that serve to legitimize male domination. The close association between women and ‘Indian tradition’ functions as symbolic violence inhibiting women's capacity to resist by compelling them to accept the legitimacy of their inferior position. However, while Bourdieu provides a useful framework for understanding the processes whereby domination is legitimized, he underestimates the capacity of the dominated to understand, critique and resist the conditions of their subordination.

³⁸ This argument is made by Grover (2011: 104) in relation to newly married women in a Delhi slum, and by Daniel Jordan Smith (2001: 132) in relation to young Nigerian Igbos.

My female informants showed no evidence of conforming out of an inner conviction of their inferiority. Women often constructed their husbands' and other men's dominance as a childish need, which they indulged simply because they could see the world more clearly and rationally, and thus did not have a similar need. I found, as Beverley Skeggs (2005: 26) did in her research with working-class women in Britain, and as has been reported in other studies of the Indian middle classes (Liddle & Joshi 1986: 185; van Wessel 2001: 240), that rather than completely taking on the "view of the dominant on the dominant themselves" (Bourdieu, 2001: 42), women 'partially penetrated' (Willis 1977) the social processes which construct the conditions of their subordination and critiqued masculine traits and dispositions. Women did not tell me that it was their duty to treat their husbands as if they were gods, or that their dharma was to be obedient, respecting and pleasing to their husbands (cf. Bennett 1983: 175-76; Leslie 1989). Rather, as has been observed in other parts of South Asia (Bennett 1983: 176; White 1992: 141), ideals of adjustment and wifely service coincide with women's own strategies to win their husbands' affection, increase husbands' self-esteem and prestige, and thereby confirm their own positions in their households. The lack of distinction between their own interests and those of their families in women's narratives reflects not false consciousness or misrecognition, but rather their limited ability to access major resources directly and their need to do so via husbands and other family members. As Patricia and Roger Jeffrey (1996: 18) observed of women in rural Bijnor, "The very structures through which women ... were controlled and which they might be tempted to resist also provided the only means by which their well-being could be sustained".

This cannot be properly understood, however, without acknowledging the paramount importance given to the unified family as the embodiment of Indian cultural distinctiveness and superiority. It is within this conception of the Indian family that women's emancipation is cast as progressive and open-minded, but also threatening, always to be kept within respectable limits of familial harmony. As 'Indian' family life is central to notions of 'Indian culture', which is in turn inseparable from middle-class respectability, it is the duty of any 'respectable' woman to place the interests of her family above all else. A woman's pride and honour is thus inseparable from her role in maintaining the unity of her family.

Respectable and Fashionable Femininity

During my time in Hyderabad I moved between distinct social worlds – the upper middle-class world of Riversdale, the lower middle-class world of St Catherine’s and the elite world of friends I had met through mutual overseas acquaintances. In each world I wore different clothing to fit in – at St Catherine’s I wore loose *churidaar* and *salwaar kameez* that had been sewn for me by local tailors; at Riversdale I wore more fitted *kurta*, sometimes sleeveless, bought ready-made from malls, with tights; when socializing with my elite friends I wore western clothing such as jeans and T-shirts. Travelling from one world to another often involved a clandestine costume change. Travelling on foot and on public transport into town in a Western outfit was likely to attract unwelcome attention from men as well as comments from St Catherine’s students the following school day. My initial attempts at wearing a *kurta* out with my elite friends left me feeling like a dowdy hick (or a confused tourist) and I quickly decided to conform to their dressing styles. I also felt the need to carefully monitor what I told members of one world about my experiences within another. Like a teenager I would tell teachers at St Catherine’s that I was going to watch the cricket at a friend’s house, when in fact I was going to a pub where I would be drinking alcohol with elite friends. While the teachers at Riversdale bought their clothing from the same places I did, I was careful not to tell teachers from St Catherine’s how much my outfits had cost.

These experiences point to the sharp distinctions between different sectors of Hyderabad’s middle class, and illustrate the complex negotiations of movement and appearance necessary for a woman’s acceptance in any one group. In Hyderabad, as in other parts of India (van Wessel 2001: 23), a woman’s appearance – her dress, hairstyle, make-up, comportment and modes of speech – are interpreted as signs of her class background, her and her family’s ideals regarding male-female relationships, and her degree of ‘exposure’. In a highly fragmented middle-class landscape, constructing a ‘successful’ presentation of self requires negotiating tensions between respectability (defined in terms of a suitably ‘Indian’ control of women’s sexuality) and fashion.

Female chastity is fundamental to a sense of middle-class ‘respectability’ and ‘Indianness’ such that only the chaste woman is seen as legitimately middle-class and genuinely Indian. In colonial India, as ‘nation’ became equated with ‘woman,’ the importance of control of female sexuality to the maintenance of kinship and caste systems (Chowdhry 1994: 297) combined with Victorian prudery to situate female sexual modesty as a primary source of identity for the emerging middle class (Poggendorf-Kakar 2001). This was evident in the sexualisation of female servants, whose portrayal in autobiographies and other texts as naturally promiscuous and sexually aggressive “helped the Bengali middle class to define in opposition to them, the ‘respectable’ (*bhadra*) identity of women of its own class” (Banerjee 2006: 87). The importance of female chastity to projects of cultural identity

formation was also evident in efforts to discourage popular Bengali songs and recitals which were seen as exposing women to wantonness and vulgarity (Kumar 1993: 15), and in the gradual desexualisation of images of *talli*, the Telugu mother, and the Tamil mother, *Tamilttay* (Ramaswamy 1997; Mitchell 2009).

In a globalized India, concerns about cultural homogenisation and the meaning of 'Indianness' continue to be resolved through a definition of Indian women in contrast to the perceived immorality and promiscuity of lower caste-class and Western women. It is through claims to female 'virtue' or 'respectability' that Indian women can assert their difference from their Western counterparts, and can prove themselves to be 'cultured' and authentically 'Indian'.³⁹ As Clarinda Still (Forthcoming-a) argues, "Prestige-honour-respect derived from female modesty becomes the differentiating characteristic of Indian society; the distinguishing mark of 'Indian culture' and the basis of Indian cultural superiority to the West." The chaste 'Indian' woman is constructed in opposition not only to the Western woman, but also the low caste-class woman whose obligation to work outside the home, inability to avoid the street and resultant exposure to the public gaze renders her, according to middle-class definitions, uncivilized and shameless, a 'woman of the street' (Qayam & Ray 2011: 268). Still (Forthcoming-a) has noted the similarities between common perceptions of Westerners and Dalits, both of whom are seen as

'simple', ill-mannered, improperly dressed, dissolute, degenerate, lacking in 'culture' and ignorant of the right way of doing things. Dalit women, like Western women, are unable to keep within their limits due to ignorance about social boundaries, lack of self-control or deliberate transgression. Concomitantly, both Western women and Dalit women are seen as morally loose, wanton and promiscuous.

Thus, to perform the role of a 'proper *Indian* woman' worthy of respect, women must not only maintain chastity, but are also compelled to overtly signal their chastity through enacting shame and modesty in their public self-presentation.

In previous chapters I have described respectability as involving restraint in matters of consumption, concern for the opinions of others, adherence to notions of 'Indian family values', and a valuing of the 'proper' roles of men as earners and women as wives and mothers. In this chapter the primary focus of 'respectability' is women's chastity, which participants suggested was reflected in women's mobility in public, their clothing and their interactions with men. I begin by describing the challenges women face in maintaining respectability while moving through public space and trying to maintain a fashionable appearance. I argue that both greater freedom of movement in the public arena and greater flexibility in terms of dress can be 'purchased', through high status consumption and access to exclusive spaces of leisure consumption. I then turn to an important feature of Hyderabad's new spaces of leisure consumption: pre-marital courtship. I argue that while platonic heterosociality has become an important means of positioning oneself as a progressive, open-minded

³⁹ See Osella and Osella (2002: 121) and Favero (2005: 173-4) on the sexualisation of the Western woman.

middle-class individual, pre-marital 'romance' is emerging as a form of 'fashion' among middle-class youth due to its location within high-status forms of leisure consumption.

Both claims to 'respectability' and claims to 'open-mindedness' serve to distance informants from the 'backwardness' associated with the Indian poor, and to align them with an ideal Indian middle-class identity incorporating both sources of status. Yet discursive endorsement and practical enactment of each form of 'morality' bears its own risks, necessitating a careful balancing of 'respectability', 'open-mindedness' and other sources of status. It was clear from informants' accounts that some of the practices associated with respectability could also be construed as 'conservative', or as signs of insufficient 'exposure'. It was also evident that practices that infringed on key sources of respectability, such as a mother placing her young children in childcare in order to pursue a career, could only be justified as 'open-minded' rather than denigrated as deviant if these practices were supported by other significant resources or forms of capital – education, wealth, occupation. These additional sources of status served in informants' accounts to legitimate violations of 'respectability' as 'open-mindedness'. Not all violations of 'respectability' are justified in terms of 'open-mindedness', however. Participation in the world of elite consumption and commercialized leisure may not always be respectable, but it can, as 'fashion', be a source of status in and of itself as discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to consumption. In this chapter I discuss 'fashion' as a source of status in relation to 'romance' and clothing.

Women in Public Space

Parents in Hyderabad are very protective of their daughters. While boys often attend movies and frequent bakeries, cafes and tea stalls without adult supervision, teenage girls almost never leave the house unless in the company of family members, except to attend school. Female school friends who live more than a couple of blocks from each other are reliant upon their parents to transport them to each other's homes, rather than making use of cheap and readily available public transport. Adult women are also believed to be vulnerable on public transport. They travel alone reluctantly during the day and not at all after dark. Incessant newspaper reports about attacks on and abduction of young women, along with popular urban myths about cunning strategies to lure young women into the hands of dangerous strangers (spread orally and via email and social networking sites) contribute to the notion that the public realm is a dangerous place for women. Women who enter public space have to contend with illicit sexual touching, sexual comments, male gazes, and suspicion and gossip.

It was through my own transgressions that I was made acutely aware of the rules governing women's movement within the public sphere. I was openly advised against running and riding a bicycle on the basis that 'it does not look good'. It took me some time however to learn that I was in fact transgressing the boundaries of appropriate feminine comportment on a daily basis. When I first arrived in the city I found walking down the street humiliating, as I was routinely ogled and jeered at by male onlookers. While my novelty as the only foreigner in the area is likely to have contributed to

the intensity with which I was harassed, the frequency with which people complained about ‘eve teasing’ suggested that local women were subjected to similar treatment. My initial response was to walk with my head down – if I could not see the stares they did not bother me. With time I became aware that I was no longer attracting quite so many stares or jeers. While some potential jeerers may have simply become habituated to my presence, there were new people on the streets every day. It appeared that by adopting this contained and demure posture I was no longer perceived to be inviting comment.

This experience became the topic of conversation in a St Catherine’s tenth class one day. We were having a debate about whether boys or girls get better treatment in society. The boys argued that girls get more respect in India because they have places reserved for them on buses and trains. Hoping to generate a more intense discussion and stimulate students away from rehearsed responses, I told the boys that when I walked down the road in Hyderabad I looked at the ground because boys and men stared at me and passed comments. I asked whether this was respect. The girls interjected excitedly with support for this question stating that they shared my experience. The boys attempted to construct the ‘eve teasers’ as exceptional and socially deviant, but the girls argued that these boys were themselves prone to ‘passing comments’. Finally, one of the boys recommended I wear a *burqa* so as not to attract commentary and the class erupted into laughter. Although this comment was made in jest, it is indicative of a widespread belief that it is the woman’s responsibility to adjust her self-presentation to ensure that she is ‘respected’ in the public domain.⁴⁰

The subject of ‘eve teasing’ came up again in a conversation with two recently married teachers at St Catherine’s, Meghana and Tejitha. Meghana had asked why I wore *churidaar* and I replied that it was comfortable, respectable, and a means of minimising unwanted male attention when walking down the street. Meghana explained that the reason I was particularly targeted was because, by looking at my skin colour, men would assume that I have no support. She noted that men know that she has familial support because she is Indian, although they still watch her closely to see if anything is out of place with her dress, any skin showing that should not be. So she ensures that she gives male onlookers nothing to comment on. Meghana noted that there are all sorts of people in India, so men make their women cover up and restrict their activities to protect them from harm. She observed that Indian men believe that women are fragile, and therefore try to protect them from everything. To illustrate the point, Tejitha interjected: “Don’t climb on that bench! Don’t laugh too much!”, while Meghana cupped her hands as if holding something very delicate. Meghana and Tejitha explained that because girls are brought up always being told they are fragile, they will feel that they are and that

⁴⁰ Caroline and Filippo Osella (1998; 2006) caution against interpreting sexualized remarks as simply a form of aggressive harassment through which gender hierarchies are performed. They describe ‘tuning’, a form of flirtation in which women can choose whether to interpret men’s remarks as harassment or as an invitation for communication and may respond with verbal counter-attack. Ritti Lukose (2009: 84-5) has similarly observed that witty counter-insults are one way for women to deal with ‘eve teasing’. My informants did not describe such responses to sexualized comments and I did not observe any instances of female counter-attack. It seems likely that my more upper middle-class informants were less inclined to interact with unknown men in public.

there are certain things they cannot do. Tejitha stated that these ideas exist because a girl is seen as the representative for the family. If she is shamed, the honour of her entire family is affected.

My experiences and subsequent conversations with middle-class Hyderabadis resonate strongly with the accounts of Ritti Lukose and Craig Jeffrey who conducted research on college campuses in towns in Kerala and Uttar Pradesh respectively. Both Lukose and Jeffrey note the sexualisation of women's presence in public (see also Osella & Osella 1998: 192-93; Favero 2005: 193). Lukose describes young women's frequent experience of *comment adi* (being 'hit' with sexualized comments) and sexual touching, particularly on public transport (2009: 116). Jeffrey's (2010: 100-101) research focused on the perpetrators of this activity – young men who passed their time by eve teasing and watching young women who were imagined as objectified goods or features in the campus landscape.

During my time in Hyderabad I observed that young men frequently move somewhat aimlessly from one public establishment to another as a form of 'timepass'. It appeared by contrast that women's movement had to be extremely purposeful, so as not to give the impression of being in public unnecessarily; so as not to be seen as inviting censure. Middle-class Hyderabadis' use of the word 'roam' to denote young people's public pursuit of leisure evoked an aimlessness that seemed only legitimate for men. Lukose (2009: 80) similarly contrasts the aimless wandering (*chettu*) of young men with women's goal-oriented movement through public space, while Chowdhry (1994: 253) notes that in rural Haryana women "are never seen loitering around, as only mobility which is part of a sanctioned purpose is recognized". Derné (1995: 27) likewise observes that in Banaras men limit women's public activities to those that are useful for the house, and reserve the joys of aimless wandering for themselves.

Just as low-status jobs are gendered and high-status 'professions' are not, so too low-status spaces are significantly more gendered than high-status spaces. The inexpensive bakeries and roadside 'hotels' serving tea, coffee and snacks that can be found in every neighbourhood are out of bounds for 'respectable' women in Hyderabad.⁴¹ This was also the case in Meerut where Jeffrey (2010: 99-101) observed that professors and urban society at large considered it unrespectable for unmarried young women to hang out in the tea stalls in which the young men most commonly congregated. As in Meerut, it was clear that middle-class women in Hyderabad are, however, free to spend time in gleaming air-conditioned malls and expensive coffee houses without endangering their reputations. In these spaces, practices of high-status consumption, along with the exclusion of lower-class young men believed to be primarily responsible for sexualized gazes and comments, mitigates the potentially damaging effects of public leisure for women. Lower middle-class women are thus significantly more restricted in their ability to engage in public 'timepass' than are upper middle-class

⁴¹ One family I lived with had a habit of regularly eating take-away tiffins or curries from the nearby 'hotel', which were always purchased by male family members. That such 'hotels' are not appropriate places for women was made particularly clear on an occasion when I was alone in the house with the teenage daughter. She insisted that we get her male cousin to collect and deliver our breakfast tiffins, despite the significant inconvenience for both ourselves and the cousin.

females. They cannot 'roam' like the men of their class, nor can they afford access to the elite spaces deemed suitable for female leisure.

Along with an air of purposeful movement, women and teenage girls in Hyderabad are expected to adopt particularly demure body language when in public. This again parallels Lukose's (2009) observations of women's movement in Kerala. Lukose also learnt through personal experience that women should not walk with their bodies 'open' – head up and looking around – and instead should adopt a more 'contained' position – looking ahead and slightly down, bags and books clutched to the body. According to Lukose,

The demure female body enables a young woman to enter the public, but in ways that circumscribe her movements. She must be goal-oriented and contained as she traverses a public that is also occupied by young men, whose movements and trajectories are different – aimless and wandering ... A demure femininity in public retains its interiority, which is what allows it to enter the public in the first place (2009: 80)

Steve Derné (1995: 26) similarly suggests that a shy, ashamed, modest, docile and inconspicuous comportment is expected by husbands of their wives throughout North India.

The (lower-class) male gaze serves to claim the street and other lower-class public spaces. In Hyderabad the street and other public spaces are not neutral as they are perceived to be in most western countries; they belong to lower-class males. Thus, when I enter these spaces I am the one transgressing and the gazes and comments of men alert me to this. While the elite are isolated from the rest of the world as they move in their cars from one elite space to another, lower and middle middle-class women are made to feel 'out of place' in public and avoid such spaces whenever possible.

Women's use of public space is thus severely restricted. 'Eve teasing' and the threat of sexual attack serve as evidence that women, particularly unmarried daughters, require active 'protection'. This is imperative to ensure women's safety and personal honour, as well as the honour of the wider family unit. Women's vulnerability in public justifies their confinement to the home, and consolidates the authority of male relatives to control their activities and sexuality (Mankekar 1999: 118, 144). Women cannot go to certain places, nor can they go out at certain times. They cannot be seen to be out of the house without a specific and respectable purpose. Their status has to be maintained in public through an appropriate destination, appropriate body language and, as I shall now discuss, appropriate clothing.

Fashionable versus Respectable Clothing

A final consideration for a woman going out in public, her final defence against censure and harassment, is her attire. As Meghana observed (see above), a woman's outfit is scrutinized to see if anything is untoward or out of place. According to Julia Leslie (1992), rules about women's dress in

Sanskrit religious law stipulate a range of ways for the orthodox Hindu woman to communicate messages about her devotion to her husband, her religious virtue and her ritual purity through clothing and bodily adornment. Emma Tarlo builds on this picture of identity definition through clothing in an exploration of the ways in which the problem of ‘what to wear’ has been solved in India from the nineteenth century to the present day. She argues that “clothes are literally a means of classification – whether of individuals, groups, castes, classes regions or notions” (1996: 318). In this section I explore the ways in which women’s dress continues to be interpreted as a sign of their virtue and sexual availability in middle-class Hyderabad.

Discussions of social change in Hyderabad often centred on changing dress styles, from *sari* to *churidaar* to jeans. For many the miniskirt appeared to represent all that is amiss in present-day India, and bikinis were verging on unmentionable. However, what informants identified as appropriate varied greatly according to context, and an outfit deemed appropriate by one social group was liable to be thought backward and shabby by another. Again class appeared to play a central role in determining what was and was not condoned.

Through my observations of women’s dress, in combination with the commentary and discussion that this often aroused, I gradually developed a picture of what currently constitutes respectable attire for whom in Hyderabad. Older women are unlikely to cause anyone offence in a sari, and young girls generally wear western style dresses or jeans and T-shirts. It is post-pubescent girls and married women under forty for whom ‘appropriate’ dress is contentious. Common forms of dress for a young unmarried woman can be placed on a gradient of respectability, with the *churidaar* or *salvaar kameez* lying at the safer end of the scale. These are followed by an outfit of jeans and a *kurta*, which is in turn followed by jeans with a short top (to the hips), as somewhat less respectable, but nevertheless acceptable attire for an unmarried woman. Married women appear to have a primary choice between *churidaar* or *salvaar kameez* and sari, but young and slim married women may also dress in jeans and may wear formal trousers, skirts and shirts to work. The process of identifying ‘respectable’ feminine dress in Hyderabad was made more complicated by variations in the *ways* in which the various garments described above can and should be worn – even the highly respectable *sari* can be worn in a suggestive or ‘loose’ way (Joshi 1992: 221). Added to this are differences in cut and fabric, which represent further indicators of class and style, as Ritty Lukose (2009: 55) has shown in her work with Keralan college students.

The following table documents the styles of clothing that are deemed appropriate for each category of women for different classes in Hyderabad. Although a highly simplified representation of the nuances of class sectors, contexts and dressing styles, it illustrates the complexity of establishing what is appropriate for whom at which occasion as well as the range of norms across classes. The majority of middle-class women have two broad categories of clothing style – everyday wear and more formal outfits suitable for special events such as family gatherings, pujas and weddings. For the

upper middle classes and elite, who attend private parties and patronise pubs and clubs, a third category of ‘party wear’ is included.

	Lower middle class	Middle middle class	Upper middle class	Elite
Bikini	never	never	never	young women when swimming
Mini skirt	never	never	unlikely	casual and party-wear for young women
Shorts/dresses and skirts that expose the lower legs	never	unlikely	unlikely	casual and party-wear for young women
Jeans/long skirts and tight T-shirt/singlet	unlikely	young unmarried women at non-formal events	casual and party-wear for young women	casual and party-wear for young women
Jeans and kurta/long top	young unmarried women at non-formal events	young women (married and unmarried) at non-formal events	young unmarried women at non-formal events	casual wear for young women
Tight and/or sleeveless churidaar	young unmarried women at non-formal events	young unmarried women; young married women at non-formal events	young unmarried women at non-formal events	formal wear for young unmarried women; casual wear for young married women
Loose churidaar/salwaar kameez	young unmarried women; young married women at non-formal events	young unmarried women; young married women at non-formal events	young unmarried women; young married women at non-formal events	elderly women
Sari	married women of all ages	married women of all ages	elderly women, married women of all ages at events such as pujas and weddings	elderly women, married women of all ages at events such as pujas and weddings

TABLE 8: Standard and Respectable Modes of Dress, by Class Membership

Table 8 demonstrates how difficult it is, particularly for young lower-class women, to appear respectable to their class peers without straying too far from the current and less conservative fashion, set by the elite and upper middle class. ‘Fashion’ was said to be the purview of the upper classes to the extent that several people suggested that anything worn by a wealthy person, no matter how ridiculous, would be assumed to be stylish by others. Although the elite might be fashionable, they were not always ‘decent’. Below a middle middle-class Riversdale teacher explains the concerns for decency and ‘comfort’ that motivate families like hers, as opposed to elite families, to ‘limit’ their engagement in fashion:

Usually in our families we don’t prefer the minis and all. We’re to the extent only we limit ourselves to jeans, not more than that. The short tops we don’t prefer – short, showing the belly and all. It’s OK if it is quite comfortable for the people who are with them. Otherwise we go for the long tops, to the knee, which covers our thighs and bad part. It should not be over-exposed.

It was assumed that standards of decency are obvious, but that the elite (upper middle-class and elite) knowingly shun these standards, as they have no concern for the opinion of others. Upper middle-class and elite women do not have to show the same concern for decency as their access to private transport protects them from the male stares and sexual comments that their ‘indecent’ outfits would ordinarily elicit in open public spaces. As Tejitha and Meghana pointed out to me, ‘posh’ people can wear whatever they want, because nobody can see them to comment on them.

Lower middle-class women, on the other hand, may face more significant disadvantages as a result of an inability to balance respectability and fashion. Participants’ narratives suggested lower middle-class college girls were judged by their clothing and excluded from upper-class social networks. In Chapter 3 I discussed the term *errabus*, a derogatory term denoting village poor often attached to poor and lower middle-class girls who present themselves in an unfashionable manner through not only wearing conservative clothing, but also pinning their *dupatta/chuni* (shawl/scarf) to their *kurta*, oiling their hair, tying it into tight braids, and wearing a large *bindi*. Margit van Wessel (2001: 220) describes a similar category in Baroda, where young middle-class women who fail to groom themselves in accordance with contemporary fashions may be referred to as ‘Maniben’, a name associated with the village and a village look of unfashionable clothes and a long oiled braid. Lower middle-class professionals may also experience conflicts between the clothing norms of their work places and family contexts. For example, Liechty (2003: 81) reports that the requirements for formal western dress in offices in Kathmandu creates uncomfortable situations for middle-class ‘office girls’ who are widely believed to be ‘overly’ fashionable and promiscuous.

The young women I knew in Hyderabad appeared to experience significant anxiety in relation to seemingly trivial matters of styling. They agonized over one plait or two; whether to get a ‘flint’ (a shorter piece of hair at the front, just long enough to be tucked behind the ear), or perhaps a ‘step’ (layered) cut; whether or not to wear a *bindi*. Their anxious uncertainty surrounding these decisions appeared to stem from two significant risks attached to any fashionable adjustment to their appearance – that they might be seen as ‘fast’ (i.e., open to indecent levels of man-woman interaction, or arrogant.⁴² An ‘overly’ fashionable girl, was vulnerable to being perceived as ‘stuck up’ or a ‘show off’ in her adoption of the trends set by the upper classes. Parent and student discussions of staff dress styles within Riversdale School provide an illustration of this issue. As discussed in Chapter 4, the Riversdale principal encouraged teaching staff to wear *churidaar* and western style-trousers, rather than the more conservative saris usually associated with the teacher role. She explained this in terms of comfort and greater ease of movement, but a number of parents and students identified the clothing of particularly ‘fashionable’ teachers as a sign of the haughty overconfidence, both of the individual offending teachers and of the school body in general. A single outfit choice of Roja, a St

⁴² See Säävälä (2010: 41) for discussion of similar use of the word ‘fast’ in middle class Hyderabad, Lukose (2009: 66) for examples of the association between arrogance and fashion in Kerala, and Beverley Skeggs (1997: 100) for examples of an association between excessive attention to appearance and sexual deviancy in Britain.

Catherine's tenth class girl, provides a second more illustrative example of this issue. Roja wore a pair of tights and a T-shirt to a school function, an outfit that would have been fashionable at Riversdale, but stood out at St Catherine's where all the other girls wore loose *churidaar* and *ghagra* (long skirt and blouse). Teachers and students were still talking about Roja's outfit days later. Most simply stated that she 'did not look good', some said it looked like something to sleep in, but there were also several suggestions that the outfit had been a foolish attempt to mimic upper classes.

Below I quote a young male software worker, who similarly identified women's adoption of modern or fashionable dress styles as an attempt to appear 'posh' or 'high range'. His comments touch on a number of prevalent themes across informants' accounts, particularly the notion that social acceptability and the 'comfort' of the wearer should determine what is worn. He is clearly uneasy as he carefully balances his disapproval of certain female dress styles with caveats and exceptions, which in part appear to be attempts to avoid insulting his Western interviewer, but also appear to attend to the potential that his views may be seen as overly conservative or chauvinistic:

I don't like girls wearing skirts, any skirts, because first of all they are not comfortable with it. They know they are not comfortable, but there are some girls who want to show that they are really posh or that they are some high range people or whatever. They want to wear like the heroines in the movies or whatever culture they have seen something different. They want to show it here. But you see she is a girl. Anyway she's a girl. If there's a lot wind or something is going wrong. If someone is commenting, so what she feels? It's not good for them actually. Why to go for such kind of stuff? And they wear some sleeveless kind of stuff and they'll be struggling to raise their shoulder kind of stuff. Why to do that? Be comfortable. Come on. Wear something that is comfortable to you.... in the location where she is staying, the people should be very comfortable there frankly speaking. For example, in my office what you'll see is you'll see people coming with Panjabi dress or some saris you know whatever, some pant and shirt. Then suddenly a girl comes with a midi [skirt] up to her knees and she comes with a whatever some strip, with a thread [gestures to show he means a top with shoestring straps], a single thread. You don't know how strong it is; it's a just a small thread. Really they come like that to the office and people are completely staring at them 'Oh god!'. It's not good for her first thing. So depending on your location, maybe ... Why do you want to be completely away from people? People will be commenting on them – 'Oh she is very poor that she can't wear a proper dress,' kind of stuff.⁴³ ... When your society is like they didn't see a girl in such dress before, people will stare completely. It's a problem for her if someone goes beyond that. And I would say she is the reason for it and not that particular person, because she is humiliated. There are 100 girls around and only you were attacked, maybe because you stimulated him with such kind of dress... she is giving a chance to someone who is wrong... if she is too different, it's not good for her... Depending upon the society where you live, depending on your interest your comfort, go for it.

While comfort may seem a very practical consideration, it functions as a useful metaphor for talking about class habitus. This young professional notices a lack of 'fit' between the clothing of some women and their lack of confidence and ease. It is not so much the clothes themselves that are problematic but the lack of a self-assured disposition arising from an upper-class habitus that is

⁴³ Middle-class Hyderabadis associate skimpy clothing with both the poor and Westerners. Thus, even when someone is wearing skimpy Western clothing that the observer knows to be expensive they might somewhat jokingly question whether a person cannot afford 'proper' clothing.

needed to legitimize such clothing, and the failure of the wearer to recognize the inappropriateness of such clothing in contexts that are not exclusively upper middle-class and elite.

The examples provided above have highlighted the importance of audience to women's dress choices. As Tarlo (1996: 16) has also observed, as Indian women's movements become less restricted than in the past, and as classes become increasingly fragmented, they must contend with increasingly diverse audiences with varied expectations. The sartorial difficulties of navigating different contexts were identified by some informants:

It is OK for a lower middle-class girl to wear jeans as long as she is wearing an oversized t-shirt that covers everything, the jeans are three sizes too big and you're wearing jewellery that says 'I'm from a respectable family'. It's OK. That's modern enough. That's as modern as you're allowed to be. But if you're going to travel by bus you have to wear a dowdy *salwaar kameez* and you have to sit in the ladies' section* (Upper middle-class female young professional).

If I am a lower class girl I am going to a club in a *churidaar* and don't know anything what to do and they'll definitely think I am lower class and uneducated. Indian culture is like mentally prepared. If you go to a temple you are supposed to wear traditional dress but if you go to a pub you should wear something modern. When we go for temple in mini skirt everyone will scold on us. It's not like we think I shouldn't do this because people will think I'm lower class. We come to know that we should not come in that way [go to a pub in a *churidaar*]. If you go to Chilkoor [a temple] in modern dress the priest will announce 'To the girl in the pant and shirt, this dressing is not encouraged'. But why? She may be pure at heart. Nobody knows why. I guess they'll say it's culture* (Middle middle-class female college student).

While the elite were seen as liable to expose themselves inappropriately, context-appropriate clothing was something the lower classes were more likely to fail at. Upper-class cultural capital, then, is not just about being able to afford fashionable clothes, but also about knowing what kinds of clothes are appropriate to each occasion or 'field'.

In Hyderabad, as in other parts of the world (Skeggs 1997: 99-100; Ortner 2006: 34), a woman's clothes and appearance were seen as indicative of her conduct. Failure to adhere to norms of 'respectable' appearance was interpreted as a sign of deviant sexuality. As Lukose (2009: 64) argues, in India "decisions about different clothing *styles* are structured by a politics of culture tied to debates about westernization and cultural authenticity that is highly gendered". Because women are expected to embody Indian 'tradition' and 'culture', to retain an essential Indianness that compensates for men's involvement in a material world defined by foreign values, because women's modesty is central to notions of middle-class decency, their clothing becomes a site for the expression of patriotic respectability. In Hyderabad, for a woman to be 'modern' or 'fast' is not a compliment. Such labels suggest her clothing and conduct are insufficiently demure, overly Westernized. She is not the kind of good Telugu *ammayi* (girl) that in-laws would welcome into their home.

With class distinctions cutting across scales of respectability in relation to dress and other aspects of styling, it becomes near impossible for women to be simultaneously fashionable and respectable. Two forms of appropriate femininity emerge from this class fragmentation. Upper

middle-class and elite women have access to a form of femininity in which greater freedoms can be 'purchased' in the form of fashionable clothes, private transportation and access to elite public spaces. Lower middle-class women are excluded from such forms of 'fashionable' femininity through a lack of economic and cultural capital (i.e., knowledge of what is fashionable, the means to buy it, and access to the appropriate public spaces in which to wear it). They must therefore settle for a form of demure femininity in which respectability comes at the expense of freedom of movement and self-presentation (Lukose 2009).

Timepass, True Love and the Distinction of Heterosociality

In the previous chapter I described changing ideas about love in marriage and linked these to broader socio-economic changes that appear to have led to a rise in companionate marriage ideals in many parts of the world. In this section I consider ideas relating to, and practices of, love *before* marriage. While many of the same factors described in the previous chapter clearly play a role in the changing approaches to dating and pre-marital love in Hyderabad, I emphasize in this chapter the embeddedness of romance in a world of commercial leisure and consumption. Following Simmons (2009: 108-09) and Illouz (1997) who have written of 1920s America, I suggest that it is no accident that practices of dating have emerged alongside increasing opportunities for consumption and a growing leisure industry. Interconnections between dating, leisure and consumption contribute not only to the view of relationships as sustained by fun and enjoyment between people with common tastes and recreational activities (Illouz 1997: 52-53), but also to the notion, expressed in Hyderabad, that dating is 'fashion'.⁴⁴

The increasing involvement of young middle-class Hyababadis in choosing their spouses, and their desire to know and understand someone before committing to a life with them, suggest that we might also see a rise in a pre-marital courtship culture similar to dating practices in the contemporary West. Earlier studies have reported no system of courtship in India. Seymour, for example, writes that in Orissa girls and boys had little contact with each other even in co-educational schools: "They sit on opposite sides of the classroom even in graduate school, and for a young woman to maintain her reputation she cannot be seen talking with young men, let alone socializing with them outside the classroom" (Seymour 1999: 196). My research indicates that not only has contact between the sexes become quite prevalent, but also that pre-marital 'romance' has become more common.

All participants reported that contact between young people of the opposite sex had increased. Many observed that in the past boys and girls had not even been allowed to speak to each other, whereas today young people have many opportunities to interact at school, college and in the workplace.⁴⁵ Participants noted that, if a boy and girl talk or sit together at school or college, others

⁴⁴ See Srivastava (2007: 306ff) for more on the connection between sex and consumption in India.

⁴⁵ See Kapur (2010: 51) for a discussion of new opportunities for opposite-sex socializing created by the software industry in Hyderabad.

are likely to tease them about being in a relationship. This was, however, universally presented as a foolish response of *other* people.

Junior College Student: They think that if boy and girl belonging to same age group touch each other they might be having a relationship.

Riversdale Student: Even in our class it happens. If a boy is talking to a girl for more time they think that there is something going on between them.

Upper middle-class participants showed active support of regular interaction and friendships between young people of the opposite sex.⁴⁶ They constructed strict gender segregation as backward and irrational:

Girls and boys should be more open to each other so they can be friends. If they sit next to each other they feel uncomfortable and are teased. I try to educate my daughter that it is OK to call a boy a friend. It doesn't mean you are having a relationship* (Upper middle-class Riversdale teacher).

At Riversdale efforts were made to discourage the belief that heterosociality was immoral. Although classroom seating arrangements and friendship groups remained largely gender segregated (as they were at St Catherine's), girls and boys were encouraged by teachers to sit and work with each other.

In discussions of groups or 'gangs' on campus, junior college and college students often contrasted lower middle-class and studious *churidaar*-wearing girls with posh or 'ostentatious' girls, who wear sleeveless and skin tight *kurta* and frequently skip class. One student referred to the former group as the '*behenjis*': "there's the cool crowd, the geeks, the losers, the *behenjis* ... It's a Hindi term, it means 'sisters' – like the typical Indian crowd. They'd never wear a t-shirt and denim... they come in typical Indian dress. The girls that don't even look at boys and work really hard." A blog post on 'The Behenji Syndrome' (samyukta 2006) tells us a little more about the meaning of the term. The author had suggested to a male friend that he go on a date with a female friend, who she knew was interested in him. The author's male friend refused saying that if he went out on a date with a "behenji" who "always dresses in a tent of a salwar suit", he would lose his "cool dude status" and become a "loser".

This stereotyping of 'girls that don't even look at boys' alludes to another form of class distinction based on acceptance of interaction between the sexes. Divya, a young upper middle-class professional and an upper middle-class college student gave the following examples when trying to explain differences between classes. In Divya's case it was her grandparents and parents who were of different classes. In the case of the student it was the 'mass' and 'hi-fi' groups at college:

When I was living with my grandparents my guy friends calling home was very weird. Then I moved in with my parents. When I was doing my professional course it was normal to stay out with friends till 3 or 4 am. It was OK for guy friends to stay the night. It's all about the kind of exposure levels that class allows you* (Upper middle-class female young professional).

⁴⁶ This openness to interaction between young men and women is perhaps akin to the situation that Donner (2008: 87) describes of a "more hedonistic subculture" emerging within certain well-to-do Kolkata families who allow their children to mix relatively freely with their caste-class homogenous group of friends.

So when it comes to hi-fi, they would have experienced it already and mass people would not know where, when, what to talk ... One such act that made me feel very embarrassed was in a dancing group. When I went and talked to a few girls and I started teaching them, I found some girls very uncomfortable and hesitant. Later I found out they felt uncomfortable dancing with a guy. Others just want to dance and show talent and don't care whether they're dancing with guys* (Upper middle-class female college student).

Thus, male-female interaction has become an arena for the construction of class identity among urban young people.

Participants were notably less positive about the increase in romantic liaisons, as opposed to friendships, between young men and women, although all identified this as an inevitable consequence of increased heterosociality. Courting couples were visible in many parts of Hyderabad – embracing in dark corners of parks, walking hand-in-hand through malls, or sharing secrets in Café Coffee Day and Barrista. Within the school environment there were ongoing rumours of ‘crushes’, although these were discouraged by parents and teachers, and often denied by students. One day a tenth class student was overtly depressed and refused to participate in class. His teacher took him aside and, through his tears, he revealed that he had declared his love to a classmate. She had rejected him, saying they both needed to concentrate on their studies. Another tenth class boy told me that he had had an argument with his mother, because she had discovered that his ‘crush’ had sent him a message on his birthday. His mother had told him before to end the relationship, and so was furious to see that they were still communicating. Principals and other members of school management that I spoke to admitted that they did occasionally have problems with crushes in school, and sometimes had to get the parents involved so that students would not be distracted from their studies.

As students moved into junior college they were more likely to act upon their ‘crushes’. Indeed, an upper middle-class eleventh class Riversdale student from a particularly ‘open-minded’ family openly declared herself to be in a relationship on Facebook. When she recently changed her status to ‘single’, her classmates merely commented that in future she should only date boys that they approve of. Another boy and girl in this class were rumoured to have feelings for each other. The girl apparently upset the boy by tying a *raki* (string bracelet) on his wrist on *Rakshabandan* (a Hindu festival in which sisters show their love for their brothers) thus putting him in the category of brother. As Leena Abraham (2002) has noted, drawing on idioms of kinship can be a useful way for a girl to establish sexual distance from a boy who is pursuing her or to communicate the purely platonic nature of the relationship to others.⁴⁷

Participants’ estimates of the number of college students involved in a romantic relationship varied from zero to 95 per cent. Some recent graduates and current students reported no dating among their current or former classmates and described very strict rules preventing interaction between girls and boys. For example, Geetha, the elder sister of a Riversdale student, told me that at

⁴⁷ See also Lukose (2009: 117) for a discussion of use of the language of kinship to counter/avoid sexual behaviour.

her college there were separate buses for boys and girls, separate canteens, and separate sitting arrangements in class. Girls were not allowed to wear jeans, only *kurta* and *churidaar*. She estimated that 30 to 40 per cent of her classmates had a boyfriend or girlfriend. Certain colleges and certain subject areas at particular colleges were, however, notorious for high rates of dating. Ramya for instance believed that almost everyone in her course was dating, but thought that the percentage was around 60 per cent across Hyderabad colleges, with dating almost non-existent at some lower middle-class colleges. Participants talked about 'posh' colleges where staff and parents did little to prevent relationships developing, and those who attended colleges with a wealthier student population reported higher rates of dating.

There was also variation in reports of what couples did with their time together. Geetha thought that, out of fear of their parents, young couples would only talk to each other on the telephone and meet once or twice a month in one of their homes. Ramya, an upper middle-class girl with both 'posh' and lower to middle middle-class friends, described her posh friends as 'serial daters' and noted that a few had had casual sex with people they met in bars and clubs.⁴⁸ In Abraham's research with junior college (aged 16 to 18) and undergraduate (aged 20 to 22) students in Mumbai, there was similar disagreement about the levels of sexual intimacy involved in relationships. Some students reported that relationships are generally limited to kissing and hugging, whereas others described a form of relationship that lasted until the boy succeeded in having sexual intercourse with the girl (*ibid.*: 346). In Abraham's research, 47 per cent of males and 13 per cent of females reported having participated in 'any sexual experience' (from hugging to oral sex), while experience of vaginal sexual intercourse was reported by 26 per cent of males and three per cent of females (*ibid.*: 343).

Like Abraham's informants, the middle-class Hyderabadis I spoke to tended to differentiate between 'timepass' relationships and 'true love'. In their discussions of their own relationships young people focused on commitment and fidelity and thus distinguished their own 'true love' from more sexually motivated 'timepass' relationships. Ramya, for example, claimed that an intention to marry had been firmly established before her relationship began and Mohit, a junior college student formerly at Riversdale, framed his relationships in terms of a desire to marry:

Mohit: I used to have a girlfriend when I was studying here in this school itself, tenth class, ninth ending. Like that I really talk, try to talk, mingle with her and everything was fine and suddenly her brother came in middle and warned me twice or thrice like that. 'Don't talk with my sister' and even from that time she stopped talking to me. Till that time she used to talk only with me ... She used to talk with others also but not like that she used to talk some personal things like that ... Everything was OK but just about four to five days before I was

⁴⁸ I did not ask unmarried or married women about contraception. Caroline and Filippo Osella (2002: 122) report that young people in Kerala have little knowledge of or access to contraception so that when young women have premarital sex, pregnancies often result. I asked those young people who told me that some unmarried girls were having sex why no babies resulted from these pre-marital affairs. In all cases informants looked at me like I was an idiot and told me that unmarried women who fall pregnant get abortions. According to informants, they do so without the knowledge of their parents. Abortion rates are very difficult to ascertain in India as most abortions are performed unofficially by unlicensed doctors rather than in an approved clinic or as stipulated in the Legal Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971 (Van Hollen 2003: 154).

going to propose her at that time her brother came actually. Really stupid I can say. He just warned me twice or thrice ... that's it ... In the college I have a girl. I just proposed her. She didn't react actually ... I told her that I love her.

AG: How did you decide you loved someone who you don't know?

Mohit: I knew her. I can say that. I investigated about her. What kind of girl she is. Has she roamed around with guys and all that? So I knew what background she was from. Not the caste and all. Just the school and is she having the required skills and what kind of girl she is and all that. So that's what I did and she never reacted to me. But three days back she sent me a mail saying this is not right actually. At this age this is wrong and we shouldn't be troubling our parents so let's go on with the studies and later after completion of inter [junior college] we will take off.

Mohit, like many other lower and middle middle-class people I spoke to, made little or no distinction between being attracted to someone and wanting to marry them. Young people like Mohit seemed to frequently experience 'love at first sight,' sometimes supplemented with some research into the 'background' of the object of affection. Informants were generally not particularly critical of 'true love' relationships but felt they were not nearly as common as 'timepass' relationships.

The notion of a series of romantic attachments designed to find the person uniquely suited to one's individual personality was foreign to all but the wealthiest of my acquaintances. Instead, like middle-class people in other parts of India (Abraham 2002; van Wessel 2001: 185), people in Hyderabad described relationships that did not end in marriage as merely 'timepass' or transitory fun:

Some they just do it for time-pass. It's not true love, everybody just wants to pass their time. Girls they fall in love very easily and they actually want to get married, but the guys don't fall in love* (Upper middle-class male junior college student).

Most of them fall in love for timepass – to have one girlfriend or boyfriend. But after that they'll forget very easily. They're taking the relationships very easily (Middle middle-class female St Catherine's teacher).

My informants strongly associated 'timepass' relationships with the upper middle-class and elite and asserted that young people engage in such relationships because they are 'fashion' and thus a source of status:

It's becoming more nowadays in the generation who are in teenage, who are not yet married, those who are working for BPOs and software those who have that exposure actually. ... They feel that it is status, that it's culture. They feel that because lower-grade people and the middle-class people would not have that experience, they feel, 'Great that we have that experience. Actually we are outgoing kind of people, outgoing in all the terms – in the thinking, in financial thing or in attending many parties, the rich parties and all' ... It happens mostly in the above average people and in higher-class people, not in middle class (Middle middle-class female Riversdale teacher).

This generation feel that having a boyfriend or a girlfriend is fashion. Having a boyfriend or a girlfriend is the same as having a good dress* (Young male software worker).

It's just because people like to have fun, do what they want. It's for 'passion or fashion' [laughs] ... It's like dating and all – the guys just want to be well-known. They want to be like

the hero in college – they'll talk about their girlfriends and they'll get into fights* (Poor to lower middle-class male college student).

I think a person without a boyfriend or a girlfriend would be down market in the crowd. To have a boyfriend or girlfriend is more than understanding or love or anything like that; it's like a status. Like some boys will say they have two or three girls at a time and the girls don't mind it* (Upper middle-class male junior college student).

The elite and upper middle-class make pre-marital relationships 'fashion' by performing them in high-status spaces of consumption, such as expensive movie theatres, cafés and malls. Participants talked about the importance for boys of having a car or motorbike to attract girls. They also highlighted the expense of romance for boys, who are expected to buy movie tickets, gifts and other consumables. These consumption practices were sufficient to distance the 'dating' of the upper classes from the promiscuity (both pre- and extra-marital) associated with lower caste-class groups. While for Twamley's (2010) middle-class informants in Baroda high-status consumption in movie complexes, malls and cafés were part of distinguishing respectable *long-term* relationships from 'cheap' temporary relationship, in Hyderabad such consumption worked to legitimate even temporary relationships in some class circles on the basis of 'fashion'. Romance requires not just the money for prestigious forms of leisure consumption, but also upper middle-class ease, confidence, manners and familiarity with high-status forms of consumption (Illouz 1997: 71-72). The effect, as Illouz (1997: 69) has observed of the emergence of public dating practices in 1920s America, is that members of the lower classes are "excluded from the glamorous ideal-typical definitions of dating". This is particularly problematic for women, for whom the status effects of pre-marital relationships are limited.

Informants tended to focus on the ability for timepass relationships to enhance the self-image and masculine identity of young men. In contrast, as Abraham (2002: 347) has also noted, because female sexuality is closely linked to personal and family honour, girls in timepass relationships are seen as liberal, of bad character, 'sexually available' to any man, and as coming from a family that transgresses social norms. Thus in Hyderabad, where pre-marital relationships represent a moral minefield for female participants, exclusion from the ideal-typical renders lower-class romance a great risk to women's status, as it falls outside of both 'fashion' and middle-class notions of 'Indian culture' and respectability.

These double standards were evident in the common perception among my informants that girls who engage in premarital affairs are not the type of 'homely' girls from good families that one would want to marry. Informants suggested that young men date 'modern' girls for pleasure, but want a more conservative bride whose previous and future fidelity they feel assured of. A male middle middle-class junior college student explained, "In the teen age they would like to enjoy. The modern girls will be better. But they prefer to marry homely girls. Modern girls are better for enjoyment and traditional girls are better for marriage because they are stable and secure."* This attitude appears to be widespread among India's middle classes and elsewhere. Margit van Wessel's

(2001: 217) middle-class informants in Baroda reported that boys like ‘modern’ girls before marriage, but after marriage want a housewife, not a ‘show-off wife’ (see also Srivastava 2007: 194). James Ferguson (1999: 214) similarly found in the Zambian Copperbelt that elite men “liked to have fashionable girlfriends but were less happy to see the same characteristics in a wife”.

The high value that continues to be placed on the virginity of the bride is also evident in a rumour regarding a Riversdale teacher that was circulating during my time at the school. The teacher had been divorced by her husband, and it was widely thought that this was because she had been somewhat ‘advanced’ on the wedding night, leading her husband to believe that she might have previous sexual experience. Regardless of the veracity of this explanation, the evident acceptance of the groom’s response to his suspicions amongst those who relayed the story to me highlights the ongoing emphasis on bridal sexual purity.

Thus, pre-marital romance did not always or even often lead to marriage. According to participants, many dating couples are unable to convince their parents of the match, and subsequently agree to an arranged marriage of their parents’ choosing. A number of earlier studies have indicated that love affairs in South Asia rarely result in marriage. Vatuk (1972: 87) observed that young people in 1960s Meerut expressed a desire to choose their own spouse in order to present themselves as modern, progressive young Indians, but were not in the least bit prepared to carry out this desire, as they felt unable to disregard their parents’ wishes. More recently Lukose (2009: 121) found in Kerala that the difficulty of obtaining parental approval meant that after a few years of college friendships and relationships “that exceed the boundaries of family and community norms, arranged marriages fold most young people back into their kin and community network” (see also Osella & Osella 2006: 113; van Wessel 2001: 218). Rising rates of couple-initiated marriages in suburban middle-class Hyderabad suggest that romantically involved couples are increasingly successful in obtaining parental approval. Arranged marriage nevertheless remains the norm, and public perception continues to be that pre-marital relationships are transient and, therefore, trivial. Such relationships could, nevertheless, be a source of status.

According to Patricia Uberoi (2009: 26), “romantic courtship is socially acceptable, if at all, *only* if it leads to marriage; it cannot decently be a period of open-ended experimentation in relations with the opposite sex, as in a true ‘courtship culture’”. Among Hyderabad’s elite and upper middle-class youth, however, something of a ‘courtship culture’ did appear to be emerging. Previous studies of pre-marital male-female relationships in India have explained the rarity of such relationships in terms of their incompatibility with local sexual mores, particularly the very high value placed on a bride’s virginity. I assert that the changes described above have not arisen solely from a relaxing of sexual restrictions, but in large part from a growing youth consumer culture, of which ‘dating’ forms an important part. As in 1920s America (Simmons 2009: 108-09) and in many part of the world today (Hirsch & Wardlow 2006: 14), it is the growth of a new world of commercial leisure and consumption in post-liberalization India that has precipitated an emergence of dating practices. As

Ritty Lukose (2009: 105) has observed of Keralan college life, romance “is a very public form of consumer behavior” and has to be understood in terms of “the expansion and commodification of leisure, the emergence of heterosocial interactions and their commodification, the reworking of public consumer spaces as spaces of romance, and the reworking of class and gender relations in the context of a commodified romantic”. In Hyderabad the lack of differentiation between ‘f’ and ‘p’ sounds in Telugu results in frequent pronunciation of ‘fashion’ as ‘passion’ and vice versa. A more appropriate slip of the tongue is difficult to imagine.

Middle-class women must carefully negotiate the moral perils of fashionable, but potentially dishonourable, relationships with men, without conveying a ‘narrow-minded’ low-status avoidance of the opposite sex. As Margit van Wessel (2001: 33) notes,

Young single women live with contradictory images of ideal girlhood: present standards of attractiveness, current among youth, include a bold and extravert sexuality, and ideals of modern womanhood include confidence and the ability to interact with men. On the other hand, from other quarters, the same young women are expected to comply with standards of women's honour, which demands concealment and modest conduct.

Young women do not want to be thought boring, overly conservative and unable to appreciate contemporary urban lifestyles. Yet they are also concerned about appearing too ‘fast’ for marriage. Most opt for platonic relationships, keep their eyes and hearts open for the chance of ‘true love,’ and rest secure in the knowledge that love can always be arranged.

Conclusion

When middle-class people in Hyderabad talked to me about the ‘bad’ changes they had observed in their city, they frequently focused on the increased mobility and visibility of girls and women in public spaces. Participants often described the ‘bad clothes’ worn by some young women and exclaimed that *even* girls are now smoking, drinking, going to pubs, and ‘roaming’. These activities were presented as foreign to Indian culture, and therefore inherently problematic, particularly when engaged in by girls and women. Informants consistently indicated that staying ‘within the limits’ is largely a matter of containing female presence in public, and thereby ‘protecting’ female sexuality. As a young upper middle-class man who had recently returned from overseas study explained, “She should know her limits – in what ways she’s supposed to dress and what way she’s supposed to behave. Even if my girlfriend or my wife is going to drink, I have no problem because I have been abroad ... but she should not cross her limit”.

As in the rhetoric of Indian nationalists, women’s rightful place in the home was constructed as central to Indian culture and their excessive or unmanaged presence in public life was construed as threatening to this culture. However, young women in Hyderabad face an opposing pressure to mingle with men in high-status spaces of leisure consumption, in order to identify themselves as a

fashionable global citizen, not a backward 'Behenji'. On the one hand they are expected to embody authentic Indianness in their demure comportment, 'traditional' attire and commitment to 'Indian' family values that prohibit premarital relations. On the other they are judged according to a new standard of global consumer cool. As Radhakrishnan (2011a: 50) observes, "the 'new' woman has become a subject of capitalist desire as a consumer, as well as the subject of a middle-class panic about changing sexual norms". Caught between fashion and respectability, females from all sectors of the middle class struggle to adopt an appropriate self-presentation. Such double binds are not unique to middle-class Hyderabad; James Ferguson (1999: 224-25) reports that in the Zambian Copperbelt, humble locally-oriented wives "were likely to be stigmatized as unsophisticated and inferior to their more cosmopolitan husbands," but were even more stigmatized on the grounds of respectability if they engaged in performances of 'cosmopolitanism', such as public drinking. In the United States, Sherry Ortner (2006: 34) argues that while working-class girls are taken to be 'sluts' by middle-class sorority girls, they are taken by working-class men "to be agents of middle-class values and resented as such".

Maintaining a respectable but sophisticated middle-class femininity in Hyderabad requires constant self-regulation and monitoring. The intersection of class and gender creates a double bind, in which the approval of one group generally comes at the expense of disapproval from another group. Women are judged either for being arrogant, loose and dishonorable, or for being backward and lacking in taste. This balance of respectability and fashion is particularly challenging for lower middle-class girls and women, who are excluded from lower-class public spaces by their gender and from elite public spaces by their class. As sexuality becomes increasingly important to the emerging culture of leisure consumption, as young women are increasingly drawn to the temporary status afforded by dating, it becomes near impossible to comply with the demands of respectable authentically Indian womanhood, while maintaining a sufficiently globally oriented fashionable femininity.

While the roles of respectable and fashionable femininity may appear to follow two divergent cultural logics, this masks the extent to which the maintenance of feminine seclusion and interiority is central to a successful performance of both roles. I have argued that the status attached to overt markers of wealth mitigates the loss of status that results from women's greater mobility and visibility, and more revealing clothing. It is, however, not the display of wealth alone that protects the fashionable woman's honour, but also her ability to confine herself to the privatized publics of the upper middle class and elite. The upper middle-class and elite woman is in fact less 'mobile' in terms of her presence in the most public of spaces, those understood to 'belong' to the lower caste-class male – the street, the bazaar, the roadside tea stall or 'hotel'. Fashionable femininity does not radically alter the logic of female difference and vulnerability, then. It merely secludes women from the most 'dangerous' features of public life – lower class-caste men – while providing prescribed 'safe' spaces for them to enjoy newfound freedoms.

The importance of boundary maintenance to feminine respectability is particularly clear in Susan Seizer's (2010) ethnographic account of travelling actresses in Tamil Nadu. Seizer argues that because the 'good woman' is defined by the virtues of domesticity, actresses vigilantly created confined domestic spaces while on the road to counteract the negative status effects of the very public nature of their work. In this chapter I have described how middle-class women in Hyderabad create a similar interiority through their clothing and demeanour when in public. Elite and upper middle-class uses of public space have not resulted in a claiming of the streets, a breaking down of boundaries, but a retreat into increasingly privatized and exclusive public spaces. It is through these new boundaries that 'fashionable' women maintain interiority and thus respectability in public.

As Clarinda Still (2007: 229) has argued, "Honour and shame are linked to boundaries and their violation ... The more boundaries and self-control a woman has (through veiling, seclusions, restricted movement and interaction), and the more she guards her shame, the more honour she brings to the family." While middle-class young women in Hyderabad have to employ the forms of boundary maintenance described by Still in the performance of respectable femininity, they must also carefully test the limits of these boundaries in order to develop a sufficiently sophisticated or 'fashionable' feminine identity. The careful balance of these two demands is a particular challenge for lower and middle middle-class young women, whose ability to enact a 'fashionable' identity within the limits of 'respectability' is severely hampered by their inability to afford the requisite level of seclusion within designated spaces of feminine consumption.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have presented two key moral discourses that are narrated and performed in everyday practice as a means of claiming status and prestige in middle-class Hyderabad. The first informants referred to using terms such as ‘respectability’ and ‘decency,’ to which I have added the terms propriety and reserve. This is a morality defined by the moderation of its middleness and understood as distinctly ‘Indian’. Many of the changes in middle-class lifestyles, including the rise of consumerism and public sexuality, are seen to pose a challenge to this established morality of decency. A second moral system is referred to by middle-class Hyderabadis as ‘open-minded’ and ‘progressive’. This morality is comparable to the ‘cognitive modernity’ valued by middle-class people in Baroda (van Wessel 2001: 87, 242), and the ‘global mindset’ (as opposed to an ‘Indian mentality’) required for the ‘global work culture’ of transnational IT professionals (Radhakrishnan 2011a: 57-8; see also Upadhyaya 2011: 175). It is based in a rational openness to change, a reflexive critique of unthinking submission to the norms of decency. Members of the middle classes draw on these two types of moral discourse – respectability and open-mindedness – in distancing themselves from the poor and in negotiating a balance between rejection and emulation of the elite, whose wealth, power and ‘fashion’ are admired and desired, but who are seen to have exceeded all limits of decency and as excessively Westernized. When informants spoke about the need to stay ‘within the limits,’ they usually referred to a desire to be (seen as) open-minded without transgressing the boundaries of middle-class respectability, particularly in the contexts of women’s roles, relationships between men and women, and caste.

Moral discourses, then, are part of on-going drawing and monitoring of the borders of middle-classness through the definition of what is respectable and ‘Indian’ on the one hand and what is progressive and open-minded on the other. Different sectors of the middle class experience different limits to their ability to invest the status associated with decency and propriety and the status associated with wealth, consumption and open-mindedness. The more financially constrained tend to stake their claim to middle-class status predominantly through strict adherence to respectability, while wealthier and more educated families seek to distinguish themselves through consumption, ‘fashion’ and open-mindedness. There is thus a diversity of values and consumption habits, both of which contribute to a spatial fragmentation that leaves different sectors remarkably isolated from one another.

The moral discourses of respectability and open-mindedness, and the practices associated with them, are used by informants to distinguish themselves from their class others in slightly different ways. Respectability is centrally important in distancing projects from the vulgarities of the cultureless poor and the hedonistic and Westernized elite. ‘Open-mindedness’ on the other hand allows for distinction primarily *within* the middle classes as the middle and upper middle class signal that they are more in touch with progressive global ‘mentalities’ than the lower middle class, assumed to be conservative and locally bound. Thus, while the poor are constructed as completely lacking in values

and respectability, members of the lower middle class are in many ways *too* conservative and concerned with respectability and insufficiently open-minded according to upper middle-class sensibilities. However, the upper middle-class by no means abandon respectability in favour of open-mindedness and their dominance is in large part reflected in their ability to define and enact an appropriate 'balance' between the two, to perform both forms of morality as they are differentially required by different fields. As Favero (2005, 134, 145) argues, a primary characteristic of India's middle classes today is their ability to move within a complex multi-referential world and to competently switch between different frames of identification and reference.

Most of the content of 'respectability' and 'open-mindedness' concerns women and it is in their lives that the relationship of these moralities with (romantic) consumption is most clear. Respectability for women is defined in terms of their adherence to the norms of the self-sacrificing wife and mother and through overt performance of sexual modesty when in public. Open-mindedness finds its expression in relation to female education and employment. A woman can be both respectable and open-minded, but some practices that can be justified as 'open-minded' are incompatible with respectability, such as in the case of the working woman who considers professional child-care or asserts her opinion over that of her husband. An appropriate balance between respectability and open-mindedness is thus difficult for women to achieve. In addition to this 'respectable' or 'demure' femininity and 'open-minded femininity', I have described a form of 'fashionable femininity' defined in terms of engagement in the range of practices associated with Hyderabad's new exclusive consumer spaces, including dress and romance. The public and sexualized nature of fashionable femininity is opposed to respectable femininity but is more compatible with open-minded femininity. The loss of status associated with violations of respectability norms through adherence to open-minded and fashionable femininity is felt most acutely by those women who have few other forms of capital and are thus limited in their ability to engage in high-status forms of open-mindedness and fashion. Lower middle-class women are thus the most likely to conform to respectable femininity.

In this concluding chapter I reflect on the contributions of this thesis to an understanding of class, gender and social change in post-colonial contexts. I begin by assessing the implications of my research for understanding the gendered effects of social mobility. I then seek to identify the orientation of change and aspirations by exploring the different reference points implied by these different systems of morality – India, the West and the global, past and present, tradition and modernity. As Mark Liechty (2003: 26) has observed of Kathmandu, "Middle-class culture is a veritable economy of circulating and contending narratives of honor, prestige, morality, suitability, and propriety. As these narrative currents disperse, their 'sources' become increasingly difficult to locate." While locating sources may be difficult, understanding the primary reference points in these 'narrative currents' is central to identifying the principles upon which middle-class status games are based. Finally I turn to three key areas where my thesis may have further interpretative implications –

questions of whether India is becoming more modern according to an academically-defined list of phenomena, issues of youth culture, and the possibility of discourses and practices that do not maximise personal and class interests.

The Gendered Effects of Social Mobility

In this thesis I have presented ‘respectability’ as something of a burden for lower middle-class women, a burden they can hope to escape if they can improve their economic standing sufficiently to be able to gain access to the higher education and high-status employment associated with ‘open-minded’ femininity and to be able to afford the goods and leisure pursuits associated with ‘fashionable femininity’. On the other hand I have suggested that women across the middle-class spectrum face pressures to maintain honour through boundaries and self-control, pressures which may be compounded by the additional demands of open-minded and fashionable femininity. I argue that class position and gender equality are positively related as one moves up the middle-class ladder, but with strong reservations.

The question of whether upward mobility is beneficial or detrimental for women has most frequently been addressed in relation to those at the bottom of the caste-class hierarchy. Perhaps the earliest consideration of this question appeared in MN Srinivas’ (1956) account of Sanskritization. Srinivas describes the Brahmanical practices of child-marriage, prohibition against divorce and widow remarriage and expectations that a wife treat her husband as a deity, eating after him and performing religious vows to secure his long life. He argues that the adoption of these practices by low castes attempting to improve the status of their caste means that “Sanskritization results in harshness towards women” (1956: 484). This view is shared by Berreman who asserts that the previously favourable position of women among the lower castes in North India disintegrates as these castes Sanskritize (1993: 372-78).

Karin Kapadia makes a similar argument in relation to changing class status. Drawing on research in a village in Tamil Nadu, she contends that women and men within the same family do not share the same class position and that “the status of women falls when that of the husband rises” (1995: 251). She describes the withdrawal of non-Brahmin women from the agricultural work that previously accorded them status as their families seek the prestige associated with a non-kin outsider marriage and female seclusion (1995: 253). Likewise, Filippo and Caroline Osella report that low caste Izhava women in Kerala have followed their high-caste Nayar counterparts “in adopting the bourgeois ‘housewife’ ethic and Hindu ‘seclusion’ identity” (2000: 79). Osella and Osella, Kapadia, Berreman and Srinivas assert that women’s subordination functions as a mark of distinction such that attempts by men, families or castes to claim status entail a heightening of male domination.

In contrast, Patricia Jeffery (2000) notes that while the changes described by Berreman and Kapadia have eroded traditional equality between the sexes, women themselves view the situation

rather differently. She draws on research among Indian Muslim *pirzada* women who live in strict *purdah* to argue that women's positive evaluation of their removal from physical labour as their families gain sufficient means to adhere to housewife ideals should not be dismissed as 'misrecognition' or 'false consciousness'. For Jeffery, the status attached to *purdah* may not be a means to legitimate male dominance but may legitimately reflect a preferable position for women. She suggest that for the *pirzada*, "being immured in a cage' has its attractions over the degradation of impoverishment and back breaking work" (2000: 174).

Taking a position between these two poles, Clarinda Still (2007) argues that the position of women within society at large has also to be taken into consideration. She refers to Dalit women's 'triple burden' of caste, class and gender oppression and argues that "Madiga women know that however much value work brings them within their families and communities, women's work lowers the status of their caste as a whole" (2007: 275). While labouring Madiga women value work and derive some level of value and importance from it, their work is gruelling, monotonous and poorly remunerated and they have lower social standing than their counterparts for whom education and marriage have enabled withdrawal from work and a route to a life they perceive to be better. She concludes, "From a feminist point of view, upwardly mobile Dalit women are turned from valuable workers into sedentary status producers. But Madiga women themselves believe that they are better off; for them, sedentarisation represents progress" (2007: 293).

Research conducted among upper middle-class and elite women tends to be more positive about the implications of upward class mobility for women and suggests that among these class sectors the ability to claim gender equality, rather than female subordination, is a mark of distinction. Radhakrishnan, for example, argues that the high status of female IT professionals' work and their earning power gives them "a significant say in their own life trajectories" (2011a: 12). This does not, however, completely eliminate conventional expectations that their families might have of them. Radhakrishnan (2011a: 169) highlights the importance of the notion of the 'right' amount of freedom for these female IT professionals:

not as much as abroad, where your sexual and leisure behaviors might indicate a rejection of family and thus a loss of culture, but not as little as in earlier Indian generations, or, implicitly, those less-educated and less well-off Indians today who cannot exercise these freedoms ... cosmopolitan due to appropriate levels of 'exposure' the world, but also restrained and grounded in a cultural identity that maintains the sanctity of women's purity.

My research, like Still's, emphasizes the need to consider both women's position in society at large and their position within their families. In terms of status in the wider world, lower middle-class women have less access to the education, occupations and consumer lifestyles through which upper middle-class women are able to claim status. They cannot make claims to the same kinds of open-minded global consumer capital through which upper middle-class women mark their distinction. In terms of status within their families, many of the lower middle-class families I spoke to in Hyderabad

had followed similar trajectories to those described by Still and Kapadia, with women from socially mobile families being more educated and less involved in paid employment than their uneducated labouring kinswomen of previous generations. I have also described a movement in the opposite direction as women enter paid employment when their incomes are needed to maintain middle-class status or when their work is sufficiently prestigious to make it beneficial in status terms. Whether this work has a positive impact on women's status within their families is difficult to assess. Domestic work remains women's work at all levels creating a 'double burden' for working women that is particularly difficult to manage for those who cannot afford domestic help. Informants were of the opinion that an income of her own gives a woman greater ability to assert herself within her family, but in all sectors of the middle class the woman is expected to subordinate their interests to those of her husband and family. Upper middle-class women have resources – education, employment and money – that give them status in the wider world independent of their families and make them better able to leave their families should they feel it is necessary. They are also advantaged by upper middle-class gender ideologies in which the idea that women are *naturally* suited to a subordinate role in the family has been delegitimized to a greater extent than among the lower middle class, and the idea that women should be independent and should have the opportunity to gain personal fulfilment through education and employment has greater legitimacy. All of these factors give upper middle-class women greater bargaining power within their families.

However, the status of women in all sectors of the middle class is determined to a large extent by the position of their husbands and families such that for most women their interests remain inseparable from those of their families. Companionate marriage ideals appear to have done little to shake the notion that permanence is an important measure of a good marriage (see Chapter 6). Thus, while it appears to be the case that the position of lower middle-class women both within their families and in wider society would be improved by upward mobility, all middle-class women are severely limited in their ability to gain status in wider society independently rather than via husbands or their families. Continued efforts to define Indian distinctiveness from the West in terms of the modesty and domesticity of Indian women make it particularly difficult for women to challenge gender roles even when they appear to have the socio-economic resources to do so. As the Indian middle classes become more immersed in a global consumer culture, it seems likely that gender will continue to function as an important ground upon which to fight for the stability and distinctiveness of 'Indian culture'.

The Modern and the West in Middle-Class Aspirations

'Modernity' is often posited as something that people in developing countries desire. The concern here is not whether such people are living in conditions that can be described as 'modern' (according to a specific cluster of phenomena identified as such by academics), but rather with local ideologies

and evaluations of modernity. When modernity is approached “as an ethnographic problem and not as an overarching analytical category” (Spitulnik 2002: 200; see also Knauf 2002: 4), it is clear that although academics have become increasingly wary of the concept that something ‘traditional’ can become ‘modern’ (as posited in classic modernization theories), this notion has taken hold across the world, such that people draw on these concepts when constructing identities and signalling social differences (Rowlands 1995: 23; Jeffrey et al. 2008: 15; Mosse 2003: 333).

Laura Rofel (1999), in her examination of the changing lives of female workers in a state-owned silk factory in Hangzhou, found that ‘modernity’ was something that was debated and pursued passionately. James Ferguson describes an “ambition to participate on equal terms in a ‘first-class’ modernity” (1999: 205) in the Zambian Copperbelt town of Kitwe. A ‘modern’ identity was something also sought by NGO workers in Nepal who distanced themselves from ‘irrational’ beneficiaries (Heaton Shrestha 2006). In Egypt, according to Lila Abu-Lughod, it is producers of government-controlled Egyptian television serials that “construct themselves as guides to modernity and assume the responsibility of producing, through their television programmes, the virtuous modern citizen” (1995: 191). In their introduction to a volume on the increasing importance attached to romantic love around the world, Jennifer Hirsch and Holly Wardlow (2006: 14) argue that the association of companionate marriage with modernity is globally shared and is part of its global appeal.⁴⁹

In many accounts, a desire for the modern is articulated through orientation towards non-local, particularly ‘Western’, goods, cultural forms and social networks (Jeffrey 2010: 173). According to Mark Liechty, for example, a ‘Western’ model or image of modernity is the object of intense desire in Kathmandu, and young people especially are “often desperate to claim modern identities” (2003: 241). He suggests that because Nepal is on the receiving end of development aid, Nepalis understand their locality in terms of underdevelopment and see development/modernity as “essentially a foreign commodity” (2003: 237), entering their country from the outside. The idea of the ‘modern’ as something inherently foreign emerges also in Spitulnik’s analysis of local words and phrases in that were used either to denote elements of modernity or by speakers to signal/perform their own modernity in Zambian radio culture. She found that there was “no single term or phrase that captures the reality of being modern while not being un-African” (2002: 206).

Such desires for the ‘modern’ are complicated, however, as they are enacted in contexts where materials and practices understood as ‘tradition’ may also be valued. This is evident, for example, in the self-consciously ‘anti-modern’ or ‘neotraditional’ cultures of youth who reject consumerism and notions of school education as progress (Bucholtz 2002; Levinson 1999; Demerath 1999), in the ‘traditionalism’ of priests at the Minakshi temple in Madurai, Tamil Nadu (Fuller 2004a), and in the ways South Asian middle classes balance and contextually perform cultural styles coded as ‘modern’

⁴⁹ See also Ferguson (1999: 176, 205) on the significance of the ‘Western’ nuclear family as a sign of ‘modern’ sophistication.

and ‘traditional’ (Liechty 2003; Radhakrishnan 2011a; Jeffrey et al. 2008). In accounts of ‘traditionalism’, the traditional is usually associated with local national, ethnic or religious cultures.

With such ethnographic accounts in mind, I began fieldwork in Hyderabad expecting informants to be actively debating the benefits and pitfalls of modernity and to be constructing identities as ‘modern’ and/or ‘traditional’ people. I deliberately avoided using these terms, hoping to observe them as they were used by informants ‘naturally’ in everyday speech. After several months I had heard the term ‘modern’ used only a handful of times, most commonly in reference to ‘Western’ styles of clothing contrasted with ‘traditional dress’ of saris, *kurta*, *churidaar* and *salwaar*. The word ‘tradition’ was used slightly more frequently, usually in reference to customs or ritual practices, particularly the celebration of Hindu festivals. Although discussion of the benefits and drawbacks of change was pervasive, such debates were not framed in terms of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. Towards the end of my fieldwork I began to ask people directly about the term ‘modern’. Often I was told that it was just another way of talking about the present in contrast to the past, i.e., the contemporary. The term was also strongly associated with clothing as evident in informants’ suggestions that equivalent terms include ‘style’ and ‘fashion’.⁵⁰ The close association between ‘modern’ and ‘fashion’ is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that among the lower middle class (less fluent in English) ‘modern’ and ‘model’ were indistinguishable or interchangeable in speech and writing.

Why were ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ such empty concepts for my informants when they appear so value-laden in other ethnographic accounts? Is it simply the terms that were missing or were my informants for some reason less concerned about locating themselves and others along a timeline of ‘progress’ and ‘development’? Do my informants see themselves as striving toward modernity when they purchase new clothing, electronics and other commodities for their homes, when they send their children to private English-medium schools, when they send their daughters to university, when women enter paid employment, when they have pre-marital relationships and love marriages or when they get divorced? And if they do, do they see this modernity as inherently Western or as un-Indian in any way? My impression is that if asked directly they would say they do want to be modern, but not *too* modern, but would not have thought about this in such terms before. They would see ‘modern’ as reasonable descriptor for all the practices listed above, but would not ordinarily describe them as such. And they would see no contradiction in being both modern and Indian, as long as that modernity does not involve excessive Westernization.

Hyderabad’s middle-classes do express desires to be progressive, open-minded and fashionable all of which might fit into the concepts of the ‘modern’ employed by other researchers and their informants. Middle-class Hyderabadis do not appear to see such things as inherently Western nor are they often described as ‘modern’, but the very idea of progress suggests that in large part this is a difference of vocabulary. ‘Progressive’ and ‘open-minded’ for my informants were part of a cluster of

⁵⁰ I asked Seventh Class students (n=107) at Riversdale to write down the three words they associated most strongly with the word ‘modern’ and collated the results. The most popular terms were ‘stylish’ (mentioned 58 times), ‘fashion’ (46), ‘latest’ (38), ‘new’ (24), ‘advanced’ (15) and ‘hi-tech’ (13).

loosely associated ideas, images and terms that included continuous or quick action (indexed by the word 'fast'); newness or novelty; an idea of progress; consumption; prosperity and affluence; being conversant with outside forms of knowledge and goods; science; rationality; and individualism (cf. Spitulnik 2002). This thus appears to be a globally-oriented 'progressiveness' that stands in contrast to notions of respectability understood as more local or 'Indian'. This 'globalism' or perhaps 'cosmopolitanism' aims to signal that a person is 'in touch' with 'international standards' both ideologically and materially, something of great importance to a new middle class that imagines itself at the forefront of a nation's striving to claim a more prominent position on the global stage.

This global orientation is in many ways similar to the 'cosmopolitan cultural style' described by James Ferguson in relation to the *Zambian Copperbelt*. Like *Zambian cosmopolitans*, *Hyderabad's* middle classes prize "not 'the West' or Europeanness so much as 'the world out there,' the place where hit songs and action films come from, where 'things are happening'" (Ferguson 1999: 215). Although the global economy and colonial histories ensure that this imagined 'world' is centred on 'the West' in some form, the concern of cosmopolitans is not to be 'Western' but to participate on equal terms – culturally, materially, politically and economically – in a global society.

According to Ferguson, performances of cosmopolitanism in *Zambia* are "aimed at an imaginary 'hip' world somewhere 'out there'" (1999: 226). What separates *Hyderabad* from *Zambia* and from *Kathmandu* (Liechty 2003) is that this imagined 'hip world out there' is also 'right here' in *Hyderabad* embodied by local Bollywood and Tollywood stars and other members of the local elite. The luxuries that Liechty's and Ferguson's informants desired are very much present in the lives of *Hyderabad's* upper middle-class and elite. The poor and lower middle-classes do not have to look abroad for models of a 'modernity' understood in terms of consumer goods and luxurious lifestyles. Although *India* is similarly underdeveloped, middle-class informants see themselves as part of 'future global super-power *India*' rather than 'poverty *India*'. Thus, middle-class *Hyderabadis* are unlikely to see themselves as situated so decidedly on the peripheries of modernity that they should be striving for it. While participants may agree if prompted that 'the West' is 'more modern' than *India*, they do not see modernity as inherently foreign to *India* and tend to view luxury as a matter of economic privilege rather than as a sign of 'modernity'.

According to Satish Deshpande (2003: 150), the Indian middle class is today "interpellated by globalization in the same ... way that, a generation or two ago, it identified itself with development". I contend that this shift from development to globalization has resulted in a parallel shift in the orientation of middle-class aspirations from a desire for the 'modern' to a desire for 'cosmopolitanism'. A globally-oriented cosmopolitanism (expressed in terms of 'fashion' and 'open-mindedness') in globalized *Hyderabad*, then, is not as anti-local as it is in more development-oriented *Zambia* and *Nepal* where the 'modern' is perceived as something not yet achieved locally and thus as inherently foreign.

These places are all united, however, in the way that the ‘global’ or ‘cosmopolitan’ is put to use in local status games. I contend that middle-class Hyderabadis’ aspirations are oriented primarily towards a local elite, and that ‘cosmopolitanism’, expressed in ‘open-mindedness’ and ‘fashion’, is simply a resource, something the elite use to distinguish themselves from those below them and something the lower classes desire because they realise that it is a mechanism through which they too could assert their superiority. ‘Open-mindedness’ and ‘fashion’ are less about modernization and Westernization than about local class production (see also Liechty 2003: 148, 251). Like Craig Jeffrey (2010: 172, 179, 188), I am sceptical about the extent to which it is useful to think of India’s middle class as becoming subsumed within a ‘global middle class’ (Milanovic 2005), and stress the importance to processes of class reproduction of control over *local* social and cultural capital, the value of which is negotiated in *local* fields.

I contend that we need to be cautious about *substituting* models of modernity, Westernization and traditionalism for class-caste analysis. Those of low caste-class status do not want to be modern, they want the power to define legitimacy, and modernity (or at least discourses about what constitutes ‘progress’) is a particularly powerful legitimizing tool. We need to move beyond the *content* of what people aspire for and instead pay closer attention to *who* defines legitimate aspiration. We need to pay close attention, as I have done in this thesis, to the specific details of people’s status claims – whether these are framed in terms of modernity, tradition, respectability or open-mindedness – and the mechanisms that make some routes to status more accessible than others.

Local discourses of tradition and modernity, progress and backwardness are utilized in local status games and serve to legitimize the domination of the elite over the poor and men over women. As Appadurai and Breckenridge (1995: 16) assert,

What is distinctive about any particular society is not the fact or extent of its modernity, but rather its distinctive debates *about* modernity, the historical and cultural trajectories that shape its appropriation of the means of modernity and the cultural sociology (principally of class and state) that determines who gets to play with modernity and what defines the rules of the game.

Bourdieu (1984) argues forcefully for the arbitrary nature of what is considered legitimate in any given cultural context. It is only when we recognize the arbitrariness of ‘modernity’ and other discourses about ‘what it is right to be’ – respectability, open-mindedness, fashion – that we can fully understand that they are a means to an end – status – and not an inherently legitimate end in themselves.

This arbitrariness is evident in the sliding scale of judgements amongst different middle-class groups in India that make it possible to always condemn those both above and below. For example, Craig Jeffrey’s (2010) informants in the small provincial town of Meerut were highly critical of the globalized lifestyles of the urban upper middle class and asserted the value of their own hard work against the ‘silver spoon’, ice-cream-eating, easy wealth of this urban upper middle class. My middle and upper middle-class informants are probably exactly the sort of people Jeffrey’s informants seek to

distinguish themselves from, but for them it is the elite whose globalized/Westernized and overly leisured lifestyles form a negative reference point in practices of distinction. Similarly while my informants constructed elite software workers as overly Westernized, the transnational software workers studied by Radhakrishnan (2011a) employed very similar moral discourses in distinguishing themselves from BPO (Business Process Outsourcing; usually call centres) workers.

Bourdieu's concept of the 'field' provides a useful means of conceptualizing competing efforts to define legitimate cultural capital. Because different sectors of Hyderabad's middle class are fairly isolated from each other, one can think of upper middle-class and lower middle-class 'fields', with open-mindedness and fashion recognized as legitimate cultural capital primarily in upper middle-class fields and respectability having primary legitimacy in lower middle-class fields. While lower middle-class concern for respectability may earn them status in lower middle-class fields, it is a resource they cannot capitalize on in the field of new economy employment where the upper middle class and elite assert the importance of 'exposure', and in new spaces of leisure consumption where 'fashion', as defined by the upper middle class and elite, is the most valued resource. Lower middle-class efforts to perform open-mindedness and fashion are likely to be deemed unrespectable by their lower middle-class peers and unconvincing by the upper middle class due to a lack of the necessary economic capital and embodied cultural capital, i.e., habitus.

Furthermore, all sectors of the middle class also move between different fields in which 'respectability', 'open-mindedness' and 'fashion' have different legitimacy. For example, while upper middle-class people may feel the need to express discourses of open-mindedness in relation to women's roles and caste while in public, in domestic and family contexts a 'respectable' gendered division of labour and 'respectable' distancing from class-caste others may be necessary to maintain status. Upper middle-class informants expressed pride in their ability to be fashionable in malls and pubs, to display open-minded exposure in the workplace and in their pragmatic approach to everyday issues, and to display a respectable concern for 'Indian culture and traditions' in their approach to family relations. Their dominant cultural capital is thus defined not simply by their performance of one form of cultural capital or the other, but in terms of the ease and confidence with which they move between performances as they move between fields. The diversity of forms of cultural capital valued in different fields, and the fact that the ability to perform each when contextually appropriate is itself a key form of cultural capital, indicates that the value of any form of cultural capital is only assessable in relation to the fields in which its legitimacy is asserted.

My assertion that 'respectability' and 'open-mindedness' and 'fashion' are valued differently in different 'fields' echoes older arguments about the compartmentalized nature of Indian adaptations to socio-economic change. This model can be found in Chatterjee's comments regarding the colonial middle-class distinction between the traditional, Indian, spiritual, feminine home and the modern, Western, masculine public sphere as well as in Singer's (1972) observations of a 'modern' work sphere and 'traditional' domestic and social life in 1960s Chennai. Upadhyay's (2008: 68) recent study

of IT workers in contemporary India alerts us to the ever-shifting nature of the boundaries of compartmentalization:

Just as the emergent colonial middle class posed an opposition between the inner world of culture, tradition and values, and the outer world of modernity ..., Indian software engineers often draw a distinction between outward changes in material lifestyle and everyday attitudes and behaviour, and a stable inner core of cultural values and beliefs that they claim to have retained.

Rather than seeing this as a somewhat inevitable incremental process of change whereby one sphere of social life after another gives way to 'modernity', I argue that the power of the elite lies in large part in their ability to define which status claims are appropriate for which contexts and that compartmentalization is a hegemonic project. Again, the observation that different strategies for gaining and maintaining status are accorded greater legitimacy in different fields should not be the final point of analysis. We need to move further to questions of who defines the boundaries of appropriateness and how these ways of performing and talking about social change serve to reproduce patriarchal relations and class-caste exclusions.

One way of doing this is to acknowledge the artificiality of the dualisms employed in analysis of social change. In their account of young educated young men in rural Uttar Pradesh, Patricia and Roger Jeffery and Craig Jeffrey (2008) call for a move away from analysis in terms of binary choices such as modern versus traditional cultural styles. They emphasize the ambivalent, contradictory and partial nature of social change and criticize linear conceptions of social transformation. Thus far the notion of different moralities has been an analytic convenience that reveals contrasts between different routes to status and the conditions that encourage each discourse of morality and its associated practices. In the discussion above, however, I have argued that such shorthand models often over-simplify complex status strategies and obscure the power relations that structure them. While one might argue, as Ferguson does, that these moralities "do not pick out total modes of behavior but rather poles of social signification" (1999: 95), as the discussion above of India and the West, the modern and the traditional illustrates, these moralities are not consistently oriented toward specific poles. I found, as Favero (2005: 4) did when talking to young middle-class men in New Delhi, that India and the West, local and global, modern and traditional, did not appear in informants' narratives "as given dichotomic 'entities' with fixed meanings, but were, rather, fluid, constantly evolving and dialogically shaping each other".

In practice, as indicated throughout this thesis, people hold seemingly contradictory assumptions about life and draw from a fluid set of different strategies in their efforts to achieve status. The boundaries between 'respectability' and 'open-mindedness' are complex and messy; they are coexisting tendencies rather than dichotomous discrete cultural styles. The terms, ideas and practices associated with respectability and open-mindedness are not inherently opposed, nor do seemingly homologous oppositions neatly map onto each other. The only way we can fully

understand the relationships between these ‘bushy’ clusters of signification is to see that they only become meaningful and valued when they are put to work in processes of class and gender production. India and the West, tradition and modernity, respectability and open-mindedness are ultimately not usefully thought of as cultural styles or as opposed moralities, but as a body of loosely associated reference points inconsistently employed in practices of class and gender distinction.

Further Research Implications

Throughout this thesis I have considered informants’ assertions that change needs to be ‘within the limits’ and have sought to define and understand these limits. It is now time to consider the limits of the thesis itself and to look beyond these limits to further research implications. Three avenues for further analysis emerge most strikingly from this thesis: the modernity of middle-class Indian lives, the emergence of a distinct ‘youth culture’, and the possibility of ‘disinterested’ rather than self-maximising action.

In this thesis I have been interested “not in the existence or non-existence of modernity per se, but in the power of the idea of modernity” as a folk category of considerable power (Qayam & Ray 2011: 251). This focus reflects my concern with social reproduction which has prompted me to explore the ways in which elite and middle-class definitions of progress, respectability, and ‘Indian culture’ exclude the lower classes and legitimize the domination of women. One could, however, interpret my material in terms of a classic unilinear modernization process:

Tradition → Modernity
Past → Present
Rural → Urban
Lower class → Upper Class
Respectability → Open-mindedness

Against such a reading I again assert the multiplicity of fields, each with its own stakes and rules, the balance or contextual performance sought by informants between different forms of cultural capital, and the complex interplay between emulation, appropriation and rejection in the status games of different sectors of the middle class. To reject such linear social transformation in favour of ambivalent, contradictory and partial social change does not, however, necessitate rejection of modernity as an analytical framework altogether.

Social scientists are now generally in agreement that measuring the degree to which societies around the world comply with an ideal Western modernity is a futile project that ignores the incomplete or ‘fractured’ (Joshi 2001) nature of all, including Western, modernities. Nevertheless, scholars continue to study specific local configurations of the characteristics of modernity, each considered an equally legitimate ‘alternative modernity’ (Gaonkar 2001: 13; see also Comaroff & Comaroff 1993; Eisenstadt 2000; Wittrock 2000) or ‘varieties of modernity’ (Schmidt 2006: 78). Thus

one could, as Fuller and Narasimhan (2008) have done, consider the extent to which an increased involvement of young middle-class Indians in choosing their spouse may indicate a rise in 'modern' individualism, or, as Parry (2001) has done, explore the applicability of Giddens' (1992) notion of the late-modern 'pure relationship' to companionate ideals of marriage in India. While such lines of investigation have been beyond the scope of this thesis, the fact that Riversdale held a workshop for teachers on how to be more individualistic, the widespread discussion among the upper middle class of the need for Indians to be more independent and to think for themselves, and the increasing focus on personal emotional fulfilment in marriage all suggest the need for attention to the rise of individualism and its impact on relationships. Such research could not only provide insights into the nature of social change in contemporary India, but also contribute to wider debates about the nature of the relationship between individualism and companionate marriage ideals and other 'modern' institutions.

Also in need of further investigation is the possibility of an emerging youth culture of fashionable consumption and romance. During my research in suburban Hyderabad, people frequently explained changes in values and lifestyles in terms of a 'generation gap'. It was widely asserted that people of different generations have very different ideas about what a 'good life' or a 'decent life' entail, and that generational difference is in and of itself a reason for these differences. The significance of 'generation' as a framework for understanding rapid social and cultural change was conveyed particularly vividly by an upper middle-class college student in her early twenties. Kruthi told me that in the past people in their forties spent time together as they had a lot in common, as did people in their fifties, thirties, and so on. Today, however, the differences in 'exposure' between people of different ages are so vast that a difference of five or sometimes only one or two years constitutes a 'generation gap'. As a result, people now tend to befriend people of exactly the same age as themselves. She explained:

What I have learnt in my Tenth is different from what those in Tenth today are learning. They learn more and even younger students have even more exposure. We were given mobiles only in our first year of engineering but now they are getting mobiles in Ninth and Tenth. They are more aware of what is happening around them ... Now even an Eighth Class student is very mature. We were comparatively less mature. Now people are getting a broader outlook younger. That generation gap is seen very much.*

There was significant evidence to support discourses of a widening gap between generations (or in Kruthi's framework, a reduction in the number of years that constitutes a generation). People I spoke to in their twenties differed from those in their fifties in terms of education, occupation and household structure as well as in their attitudes to relationships between men and women, dressing styles and leisure activities. The focus on differences between class sectors in this thesis has not allowed space for extensive consideration of intergenerational differences. Understandings of social change in South Asia would, however, benefit greatly from consideration of the extent to which

differences in the lifestyles and values of young people are the pioneering wave of a broader cultural shift or are indicative of a youth counterculture that individuals move away from as they mature.

In this thesis I have described a process of balance and negotiation between two systems of morality, respectability and open-mindedness. Following Bourdieu, I have argued that such moralities are employed by middle-class people in Hyderabad as forms of 'distinction' that enable them to assert their superiority over their class others. Such moralities are forms of cultural capital that function to exclude those without the relevant capital and thus to reproduce inequality. The resultant picture is one of rational self-maximization that leaves little room for irrational, irregular or altruistic behaviour that is not in the interests of the individual or their class. I could be accused of presenting a kind of moral mathematics in which people add and subtract different forms of morality in an effort to achieve the highest status sum.

A Bourdieusian response to such criticism would be to reiterate the pre-reflexive nature of the habitus and the diversity of fields each with its own criteria for self-interested behaviour. For Bourdieu (1990a: 108) the paradox of 'natural distinction' lies in the fact that:

An action in conformity with the interests of the agent who performs it is not necessarily guided by the conscious and deliberate search for the satisfaction of this interest posited as an end. In a number of social universes, one of the privileges of the dominant, who move in their world as a fish in water, resides in the fact that they need not engage in rational computation in order to reach the goals that best suit their interests. All they have to do is to follow their dispositions which, being adjusted to their positions, naturally generate practices adjusted to the situation.

Regardless of conscious intentionality, however, Bourdieu's model implies that all action is 'interested', aimed at maximizing cultural, social or economic capital. Bourdieu's approach to emotions tends to portray them as "socially constructed and intricately connected to power and domination" (Reed-Danahay 2005: 121), such that, for example, young people are predisposed via their class habitus to experience emotions of romantic love towards people who will enable them to reproduce their class position in marriage (Bourdieu 1990b). This leaves little scope for other human goals such as friendship and love (Jeffrey et al. 2008: 12), and actions in support of subordinate groups that do not appear to serve personal and class interests (Jeffrey 2010: 134, 184). As Beverly Skeggs (2005: 29-30) argues, non-accumulative, non-convertible values such as altruism, integrity, loyalty and investment in others, all missing in Bourdieu's work, are central to social reproduction, especially gendered reproduction.

The notion of disinterested behaviour relates particularly to three issues addressed in this thesis: middle-class involvement in community service, inter-caste-class love, and a seemingly emotional attachment to 'Indian culture'. My own and other research on the Indian middle classes has argued for the compatibility between performance of certain kinds of 'Indian culture' and middle-class status projects, has highlighted the tendency for 'love marriages' to serve class interests, and has given little attention to middle-class efforts to improve the opportunities of the poor. Attention to

performances of 'Indian culture' that appear to jeopardize efforts for social mobility, love and friendship that crosses both class and caste boundaries, and inter-caste-class political and developmental projects, although beyond the scope of this thesis, would all be necessary for a more balanced picture of middle-class motivations.

While talking with middle-class people in Hyderabad, discussion turned again and again to the importance of staying 'within the limits' when adapting to changing social and cultural expectations and norms in a globalizing India. In this thesis I have described the ways in which this notion of 'limits' was employed in constructing the boundaries of the middle classes and of appropriate femininity. I have shown that these limits are fluid and are continuously reconstructed through processes of negotiation, conflict and compromise. Further research in the areas described above promises to reveal additional nuances of these ever-changing limits.

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